



## 43.


Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart ?  
I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart  
By help of the outside face,—a reason for our wild  
Diversity in choice,—why each grows reconciled  
To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask :  
Material meant to yield,—did nature ply her task  
As artist should,—precise the features of the soul ;  
Which, if in any case they found expression, whole  
I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display  
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.  
Never shall I believe any two souls were made  
Similar ; granting, then, each soul of every grade  
Was meant to be itself, and in itself complete,  
And, in completion, good,—nay, best o' the kind,—as meet  
Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond  
With inward substance,—flesh, the dress which soul has  
donned,

Exactly reproduce,—were only justice done  
Inside and outside too,—types perfect everyone.  
How happens it that here we meet a mystery  
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why  
Either is each soul made imperfect, and deserves  
As rude a face to match; or else a bungler swerves,  
And nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,  
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite,  
—Here too much, there too little,—makes each face, more  
or less,  
Retire from beauty, and approach to ugliness?  
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to  
success,  
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,  
Evidence, to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm  
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul  
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the  
whole

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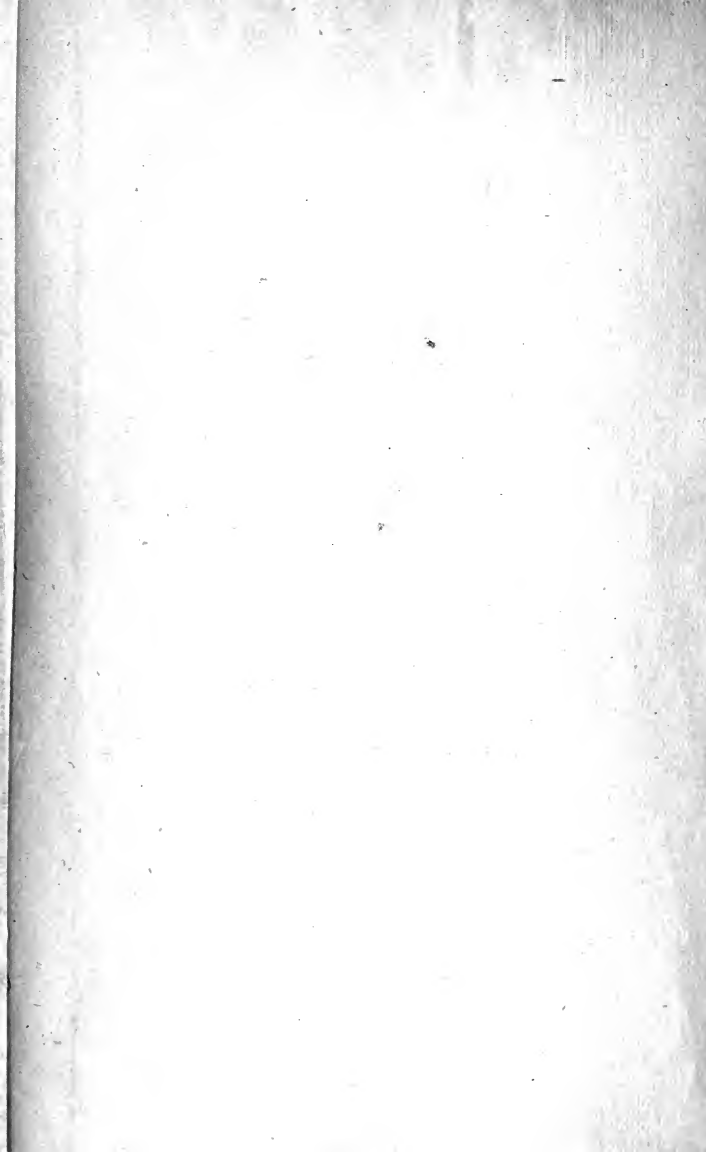
~~155~~ BROWNING (Robt.) Ffine at the Fair ;  
first edition, 12mo, cloth, 1872

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# FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

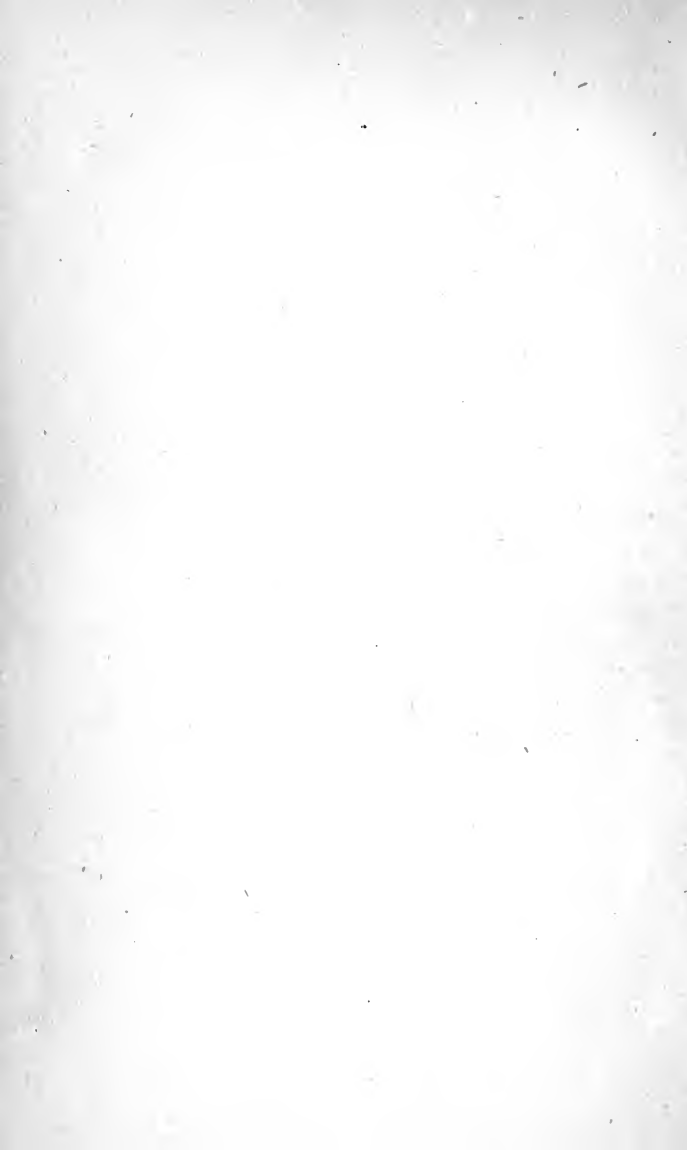
BY

ROBERT BROWNING.

L O N D O N :

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE.

1872.





DONE ELVIRE.

Vous plaît-il, don Juan, nous éclaircir ces beaux mystères ?

DON JUAN.

Madame, à vous dire la vérité . . .

DONE ELVIRE.

Ah ! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses ! J'ai pitié de vous voir la confusion que vous avez. Que ne vous armez-vous le front d'une noble effronterie ? Que ne me jurez-vous que vous êtes toujours dans les mêmes sentimens pour moi, que vous m'aimez toujours avec une ardeur sans égale, et que rien n'est capable de vous détacher de moi que la mort ?—(*Molière, Don Juan, Act 1<sup>ier</sup>. Scène 3<sup>e</sup>.*)

DONNA ELVIRA.

Don Juan, might you please to help one give a guess,  
Hold up a candle, clear this fine mysteriousness?

DON JUAN.

Madam, if needs I must declare the truth,—in short . . .

DONNA ELVIRA.

Fie, for a man of mode, accustomed at the court!  
To such a style of thing, how awkwardly my lord  
Attempts defence! You move compassion, that's the word—  
Dumb-foundered and chap-fallen! Why don't you arm your brow  
With noble impudence? Why don't you swear and vow  
No sort of change is come to any sentiment  
You ever had for me? Affection holds the bent,  
You love me now as erst, with passion that makes pale  
All ardour else: nor aught in nature can avail  
To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath,  
May peradventure stop devotion likewise—death!

# PROLOGUE.

AMPHIBIAN.

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I.

The fancy I had to-day,  
Fancy which turned a fear !  
I swam far out in the bay,  
Since waves laughed warm and clear.

2.

I lay and looked at the sun,  
The noon-sun looked at me :  
Between us two, no one  
Live creature, that I could see.

## 3.

Yes ! There came floating by  
Me, who lay floating too,  
Such a strange butterfly !  
Creature as dear as new :

## 4.

Because the membraned wings  
So wonderful, so wide,  
So sun-suffused, were things  
Like soul and nought beside.

## 5.

A handbreadth over head !  
All of the sea my own,  
It owned the sky instead ;  
Both of us were alone.

## 6.

I never shall join its flight,  
For, nought buoys flesh in air.  
If it touch the sea—good night !  
Death sure and swift waits there.

7.

Can the insect feel the better  
For watching the uncouth play  
Of limbs that slip the fetter,  
Pretend as they were not clay ?

8.

Undoubtedly I rejoice  
That the air comports so well  
With a creature which had the choice  
Of the land once. Who can tell ?

9.

What if a certain soul  
Which early slipped its sheath,  
And has for its home the whole  
Of heaven, thus look beneath,

10.

Thus watch one who, in the world,  
Both lives and likes life's way,  
Nor wishes the wings unfurled  
That sleep in the worm, they say ?

## 11.

But sometimes when the weather  
Is blue, and warm waves tempt  
To free oneself of tether,  
And try a life exempt

## 12.

From worldly noise and dust,  
In the sphere which overbrims  
With passion and thought,—why, just  
Unable to fly, one swims !

## 13.

By passion and thought upborne,  
One smiles to oneself—“ They fare  
Scarce better, they need not scorn  
Our sea, who live in the air ! ”

## 14.

Emancipate through passion  
And thought, with sea for sky,  
We substitute, in a fashion,  
For heaven—poetry :

15.

Which sea, to all intent,  
Gives flesh such noon-disport  
As a finer element  
Affords the spirit-sort.

16.

Whatever they are, we seem :  
Imagine the thing they know ;  
All deeds they do, we dream ;  
Can heaven be else but so ?

17.

And meantime, yonder streak  
Meets the horizon's verge ;  
That is the land, to seek  
If we tire or dread the surge :

18.

Land the solid and safe—  
To welcome again (confess !)  
When, high and dry, we chafe  
The body, and don the dress.

19.

Does she look, pity, wonder  
At one who mimics flight,  
Swims—heaven above, sea under,  
Yet always earth in sight?



# FIFINE AT THE FAIR.



## I.

O TRIP and skip, Elvire ! Link arm in arm with me !  
Like husband and like wife, together let us see  
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,  
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

## 2.

Now, who supposed the night would play us such a  
prank ?  
—That what was raw and brown, rough pole and shaven  
plank,

Mere bit of hoarding, half by trestle propped, half tub,  
Would flaunt it forth as brisk as butterfly from grub ?  
This comes of sun and air, of Autumn afternoon,  
And Pornic and Saint Gille, whose feast affords the boon—  
This scaffold turned parterre, this flower-bed in full blow,  
Bateleurs, baladines ! We shall not miss the show !  
They pace and promenade ; they presently will dance :  
What good were else i' the drum and fife ? O pleasant  
land of France !

## 3.

Who saw them make their entry ? At wink of eve,  
be sure !

They love to steal a march, nor lightly risk the lure.  
They keep their treasure hid, nor stale (improvident)  
Before the time is ripe, each wonder of their tent—  
Yon six-legged sheep, to wit, and he who beats a gong,  
Lifts cap and waves salute, exhilarates the throng—

Their ape of many years and much adventure, grim  
And grey with pitying fools who find a joke in him.  
Or, best, the human beauty, Mimi, Toinette, Fifine,  
Tricot fines down if fat, padding plumps up if lean,  
Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,  
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to game-  
some boys.

## 4.

No, no, thrice, Pornic, no! Perpend the authentic tale!  
'Twas not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!  
But whoso went his rounds, when flew bat, flitted midge,  
Might hear across the dusk,—where both roads join the  
bridge,  
Hard by the little port,—creak a slow caravan,  
A chimneyed house on wheels; so shyly-sheathed, began  
To broaden out the bud which, bursting unaware,  
Now takes away our breath, queen-tulip of the Fair!

## 5.

Yet morning promised much : for, pitched and slung  
and reared

On terrace 'neath the tower, 'twixt tree and tree appeared  
An airy structure ; how the pennon from its dome,  
Frenetic to be free, makes one red stretch for home !  
The home far and away, the distance where lives joy,  
The cure, at once and ever, of world and world's annoy ;  
Since, what lolls full in front, a furlong from the booth,  
But ocean-idleness, sky-blue and millpond-smooth ?

## 6.

Frenetic to be free ! And, do you know, there beats  
Something within my breast, as sensitive?—repeats  
The fever of the flag ? My heart makes just the same  
Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness, lays claim  
To share the life they lead : losels, who have and use  
The hour what way they will,—applaud them or abuse

Society, whereof myself am at the beck,  
Whose call obey, and stoop to burden stiffest neck !

## 7.

Why is it that whene'er a faithful few combine  
To cast allegiance off, play truant, nor repine,  
Agree to bear the worst, forego the best in store  
For us who, left behind, do duty as of yore,—  
Why is it that, disgraced, they seem to relish life the  
more ?

—Seem as they said “ We know a secret passing praise  
Or blame of such as you ! Remain ! we go our ways  
With something you o'erlooked, forgot or chose to sweep  
Clean out of door : our pearl picked from your rubbish-  
heap.

You care not for your loss, we calculate our gain.  
All's right. Are you content ? Why, so let things  
remain !

To the wood then, to the wild : free life, full liberty ! ”  
And when they rendezvous beneath the inclement sky,  
House by the hedge, reduced to brute-companionship,  
—Misguided ones who gave society the slip,  
And find too late how boon a parent they despised,  
What ministration spurned, how sweet and civilized—  
Then, left alone at last with self-sought wretched-  
ness,

No interloper else !—why is it, can we guess ?—  
At somebody’s expense, goes up so frank a laugh ?  
As though they held the corn, and left us only chaff  
From garners crammed and closed. And we indeed are  
clever

If we get grain as good, by thrashing straw for ever !

## 8.

Still, truants as they are and purpose yet to be,  
That nowise needs forbid they venture—as you see—

To cross confine, approach the once familiar roof  
O' the kindly race, their flight estranged : half stand aloof,  
Half sidle up, press near, and proffer wares for sale  
—In their phrase,—make, in ours, white levy of black  
mail.

They, of the wild, require some touch of us the tame,  
Since clothing, meat and drink, mean money all the same.

## 9.

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,  
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something  
good :

Must snatch up, bear away in beak, the trifle-treasure  
To wood and wild, and then—O how enjoy at leisure !  
Was never tree-built nest, you climbed and took, of bird,  
(Rare city-visitant, talked of, scarce seen or heard)  
But, when you would dissect the structure, piece by piece,  
You found, enwreathed amid the country-product,—fleece

And feather, thistle-fluffs and bearded windlestraws—  
Some shred of foreign silk, unraveling of gauze,  
Bit, may be, of brocade, mid fur and thistle-down :  
Filched plainly from mankind, dear tribute paid by town,  
Which proved how oft the bird had plucked up heart of  
    grace,  
Swooped down at waif and stray, made furtively our place  
Pay tax and toll, then borne the booty to enrich  
Her paradise i' the waste ; the how and why of which,  
That is the secret, there the mystery that stings !

## 10.

For, what they traffic in, consists of just the things  
We,—proud ones who so scorn dwellers without the  
    pale,  
Bateleurs, baladines, white leviers of black mail,—  
I say, they sell what we most pique us that we keep !  
How comes it, all we hold so dear they count so cheap ?



## I.I.

What price should you impose, for instance, on repute,  
Good fame, your own good fame and family's to boot ?  
Stay start of quick moustache, arrest the angry rise  
Of eyebrow ! All I asked is answered by surprise.  
Now tell me : are you worth the cost of a cigar ?  
Go boldly, enter booth, disburse the coin at bar  
Of doorway where presides the master of the troop,  
And forthwith you survey his Graces in a group,  
Live Picture, picturesque no doubt and close to life :  
His sisters, right and left ; the Grace in front, his wife.  
Next, who is this performs the feat of the Trapeze ?  
Lo, she is launched, look—fie, the fairy !—how she flees  
O'er all those heads thrust back,—mouths, eyes, one gape  
and stare,—

No scrap of skirt impedes free passage through the air,  
Till, plumb on the other side, she lights and laughs again,  
That fairy-form, whereof each muscle, nay, each vein

The curious may inspect,—his daughter that he sells  
Each rustic for five sous. Desiderate aught else  
O' the vendor? As you leave his show, why, joke the  
man !

“You cheat : your six-legged sheep, I recollect, began  
Both life and trade, last year, trimmed properly and  
clipt, .

As the Twin-headed Babe, and Human Nondescript !”  
What does he care? You paid his price, may pass your  
jest.

So values he repute, good fame and all the rest !

## 12.

But try another tack ; say : “I indulge caprice,  
Who am Don and Duke, and Knight, beside, o' the Golden  
Fleece,  
And, never mind how rich. Abandon this career !  
Have hearth and home, nor let your womankind appear

Without as multiplied a coating as protects  
An onion from the eye ! Become, in all respects,  
God-fearing householder, subsistent by brain-skill,  
Hand-labour ; win your bread whatever way you  
will,  
So it be honestly,—and, while I have a purse,  
Means shall not lack” . . . his thanks will be the roundest  
curse  
That ever rolled from lip.

13.

Now, what is it ?—returns  
The question—heartens so this losel that he spurns  
All we so prize ? I want, put down in black and  
white,  
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,  
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution—wealth,  
Vice—virtue, and disease of soul and body—health ?

## 14.

Ah, the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile,  
The sigh almost a sob ! What 's wrong, was right ere-  
while ?

Why are we two at once such ocean-width apart ?  
Pale fingers press my arm, and sad eyes probe my  
heart.

Why is the wife in trouble ?

## 15.

This way, this way, Fifine !

Here 's she, shall make my thoughts be surer what they  
mean !

First let me read the signs, pourtray you past mistake  
The gypsy's foreign self, no swarth our sun could bake.  
Yet where 's a woolly trace, degrades the wiry hair ?  
And note the Greek-nymph nose, and—oh, my Hebrew  
pair

Of eye and eye—o'erarch'd by velvet of the mole—  
That swim as in a sea, that dip and rise and roll,  
Spilling the light around ! While either ear is cut  
Thin as a dusk-leaved rose carved from a cocoa-nut.  
And then, her neck ! now, grant you had the power to  
deck,

Just as your fancy pleased, the bistre-length of neck,  
Could lay, to shine against its shade, a moon-like row  
Of pearl, each round and white as bubble, Cupids blow  
Big out of mother's milk,—what pearl-moon would surpass  
That string of mock-turquoise, those almandines of glass,  
Where girlhood terminates ? for with breasts'-birth com-  
mence

The boy, and page-costume, till pink and impudence  
End admirably all : complete the creature, trips  
Our way now, brings sunshine upon her spangled hips,  
As here she fronts us full, with pose half-frank, half-  
fierce !

## 16.

Words urged in vain, Elvire ! You waste your quarte  
and tierce,  
Lunge at a phantom here, try fence in fairy-land.  
For me, I own defeat, ask but to understand  
The acknowledged victory of whom I call my queen,  
Sexless and bloodless sprite : though mischievous and  
mean,  
Yet free and flower-like too, with loveliness for law,  
And self-sustainment made morality.

## 17.

A flaw

Do you account i' the lily, of lands which travellers  
know,  
That, just as golden gloom supersedes Northern snow  
I' the chalice, so, about each pistil, spice is packed,—  
Deliriously-drugged scent, in lieu of odour lacked,

With us, by bee and moth, their banquet to enhance  
At morn and eve, when dew, the chilly sustenance,  
Needs mixture of some chaste and temperate perfume?—  
I ask, is she in fault who guards such golden gloom,  
Such dear and damning scent, by who cares what  
devices,

And takes the idle life of insects she entices  
When, drowned to heart's desire, they satiate the inside  
O' the lily, mark her wealth and manifest her pride?

## 18.

But, wiser, we keep off, nor tempt the acrid juice ;  
Discreet we peer and praise, put rich things to right use.  
No flavourous venom'd bell,—the rose it is, I wot,  
Only the rose, we pluck and place, unwronged a jot,  
No worse for homage done by every devotee,  
I' the proper loyal throne, on breast where rose should  
be.

Or if the simpler sweets, we have to chose among,  
Would taste between our teeth, and give its toy the  
tongue,—

O gorgeous poison-plague, on thee no hearts are set !  
We gather daisy meek, or maiden violet :  
I think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine.

## 19.

“How does she make my thoughts be sure of what  
they mean ? ”

Judge and be just ! Suppose, an age and time long  
past

Renew for our behoof one pageant more, the last  
O’ the kind, sick Louis liked to see defile between  
Him and the yawning grave, its passage served to screen.  
With eye as grey as lead, with cheek as brown as  
bronze,

Here where we stand, shall sit and suffer Louis Onze :



The while from yonder tent parade forth, not—oh, no—  
Bateleurs, baladines ! but range themselves a-row  
Those well-sung women-worthies whereof loud fame still  
    finds  
Some echo linger faint, less in our hearts than minds.

## 20.

See, Helén ! pushed in front o' the world's worst  
    night and storm,  
By Lady Venus' hand on shoulder : the sweet form  
Shrinkingly prominent, though mighty, like a moon  
Outbreaking from a cloud, to put harsh things in tune,  
And magically bring mankind to acquiesce  
In its own ravage,—call no curse upon, but bless  
(Beldame, a moment since) the outbreaking beauty, now,  
That casts o'er all the blood a candour from her brow.  
See, Cleopatra ! bared, the entire and sinuous wealth  
O' the shining shape ; each orb of indolent ripe health,

Captured, just where it finds a fellow-orb as fine  
I' the body : traced about by jewels which outline,  
Fire-frame, and keep distinct, perfections—lest they melt  
To soft smooth unity ere half their hold be felt :  
Yet, o'er that white and wonder, a soul's predominance  
I' the head so high and haught—except one thievish  
glance,

From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain.  
Hush,—O I know, Elvire ! Be patient, more remain !  
What say you to Saint ? . . Pish ! Whatever Saint you  
please,

Cold-pinnacled aloft o' the spire, prays calm the seas  
From Pornic Church, and oft at midnight (peasants say)  
Goes walking out to save from shipwreck : well she may !  
For think how many a year has she been conversant  
With nought but winds and rains, sharp courtesy and scant  
O' the wintry snow that coats the pent-house of her shrine,  
Covers each knee, climbs near, but spares the smile benign

Which seems to say "I looked for scarce so much from  
earth!"

She follows, one long thin pure finger in the girth  
O' the girdle—whence the folds of garment, eye and eye,  
Besprent with fleur-de-lys, flow down and multiply  
Around her feet,—and one, pressed hushingly to lip :  
As if, while thus we made her march, some foundering  
ship

Might miss her from her post, nearer to God half-way  
In heaven, and she thought "Who that treads earth can  
pray?

I doubt if even she, the unashamed ! though, sure,  
She must have stripped herself only to clothe the poor."

## 21.

This time, enough's a feast, not one more form,  
Elvire !

Provided you allow that, bringing up the rear

O' the bevy I am loth to—by one bird—curtail,  
First note may lead to last, an octave crown the scale,  
And this feminity be followed—do not flout !—  
By—who concludes the masque with curtsey, smile and  
pout,  
Submissive-mutinous? No other than Fifine  
Points toe, imposes haunch, and pleads with tambourine !

## 22.

“ Well, what's the meaning here, what does the masque  
intend,  
Which, unabridged, we saw file past us, with no end  
Of fair ones, till Fifine came, closed the catalogue ? ”

## 23.

Task fancy yet again ! Suppose you cast this clog  
Of flesh away (that weeps, upbraids, withstands my arm)  
And pass to join your peers, paragon charm with charm,

As I shall show you may,—prove best of beauty there !  
Yourself confront yourself ! This, help me to declare  
That yonder-you, who stand beside these, braving each  
And blinking none, beat her who lured to Troy-town beach  
The purple prows of Greece,—nay, beat Fifine ; whose  
face,

Mark how I will inflame, when seigneur-like I place  
I' the tambourine, to spot the strained and piteous blank  
Of pleading parchment, see, no less than a whole franc !

## 24.

Ah, do you mark the brown o' the cloud, made bright  
with fire

Through and through ? as, old wiles succeeding to desire,  
Quality (you and I) once more compassionate  
A hapless infant, doomed (fie on such partial fate !)  
To sink the inborn shame, waive privilege of sex,  
And posture as you see, support the nods and becks

Of clowns that have their stare, nor always pay its price ;  
An infant born perchance as sensitive and nice  
As any soul of you, proud dames, whom destiny  
Keeps uncontaminate from stigma of the sty  
She wallows in ! You draw back skirts from filth like her  
Who, possibly, braves scorn, if, scorned, she minister  
To age, want, and disease of parents one or both ;  
Nay, peradventure, stoops to degradation, loth  
That some just-budding sister, the dew yet on the rose,  
Should have to share in turn the ignoble trade,—who  
knows ?

## 25.

Ay, who indeed !    Myself know nothing, but dare  
guess

That off she trips in haste to hand the booty . . yes,  
'Twixt fold and fold of tent, there looms he, dim-discerned,  
The ogre, lord of all, those lavish limbs have earned !

—Brute-beast-face,—ravage, scar, scowl and malignancy,—  
O' the Strong Man, whom (no doubt, her husband) by  
and by

You shall behold do feats : lift up nor quail beneath,  
A quintal in each hand, a cart-wheel 'twixt his teeth.

Oh, she prefers sheer strength to ineffective grace,  
Breeding and culture ! seeks the essential in the case !

To him has flown my franc ; and welcome, if that  
squint

O' the diabolic eye so soften through absinthe,

That, for once, tambourine, tunic and tricot 'scape

Their customary curse “Not half the gain of the  
ape !”

Ay, they go in together !

26.

Yet still her phantom stays

Opposite, where you stand as steady 'neath our gaze,—

The live Elvire's, and mine,—though fancy-stuff and mere  
Illusion ; to be judged,—dream-figures,—without fear  
Or favour, those the false, by you and me the true.

## 27.

“What puts it in my head to make yourself judge  
you ?”

Well, it may be, the name of Helen brought to mind  
A certain myth I mused in years long left behind :  
How she that fled from Greece with Paris whom she loved,  
And came to Troy, and there found shelter, and so proved  
Such cause of the world's woe,—how she, old stories call  
This creature, Helen's self, never saw Troy at all.  
Jove had his fancy-fit, must needs take empty air,  
Fashion her likeness forth, and set the phantom there  
I' the midst for sport, to try conclusions with the blind  
And blundering race, the game create for Gods,  
mankind :



Experiment on these,—establish who would yearn  
To give up life for her, who, other-minded, spurn  
The best her eyes could smile,—make half the world  
sublime,

And half absurd, for just a phantom all the time !  
Meanwhile true Helen's self sat, safe and far away,  
By a great river-side, beneath a purer day,  
With solitude around, tranquillity within ;  
Was able to lean forth, look, listen, through the din  
And stir ; could estimate the worthlessness or worth  
Of Helen who inspired such passion to the earth,  
A phantom all the time ! That put it in my head  
To make yourself judge you—the phantom-wife instead  
O' the tearful true Elvire !

28.

I thank the smile at last  
Which thins away the tear ! Our sky was overcast,

And something fell ; but day clears up : if there chanced  
rain,

The landscape glistens more. I have not vexed in vain  
Elvire : because she knows, now she has stood the test,  
How, this and this being good, herself may still be best  
O' the beauty in review ; because the flesh that claimed  
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed  
In me, for things externe, was all mistake, she finds,—  
Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,  
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,  
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest  
covertures,—

All by demonstrating the value of Fifine !

## 29.

Partake my confidence ! No creature's made so mean  
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,  
Its supreme worth : fulfils, by ordinance of fate,

Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,  
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.  
Where is the single grain of sand, mid millions heaped  
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped  
Or will leap, would we wait, i' the century, some once,  
To the very throne of things?—earth's brightest for the  
nonce,  
When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette  
Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet  
Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's name !  
As firm is my belief, quick sense perceives the same  
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man  
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the plan,  
No detail but, in place allotted it, was prime  
And perfect.

What happy angle makes Fifine reverberate  
Sunshine, least sand-grain, she, of shadiest social  
state ?

No adamantine shield, polished like Helen there,  
Fit to absorb the sun, regorge him till the glare,  
Dazing the universe, draw Troy-ward those blind beaks  
Of equal-sided ships rowed by the well-greaved Greeks !  
No Asian mirror, like yon Ptolemaic witch  
Able to fix sun fast and tame sun down, enrich,  
Not burn the world with beams thus flatteringly rolled  
About her, head to foot, turned slavish snakes of gold !  
And oh, no tinted pane of oriel sanctity,  
Does our Fifine afford, such as permits supply  
Of lustrous heaven, revealed, far more than mundane sight  
Could master, to thy cell, pure Saint ! where, else too  
bright,

So suits thy sense the orb, that, what outside was noon,  
Pales, through thy lozenged blue, to meek benefic moon !

What then? does that prevent each dunghill, we may  
pass

Daily, from boasting too its bit of looking-glass,  
Its sherd which, sun-smit, shines, shoots arrowy fire  
beyond

That satin-muffled mope, your sulky diamond?

## 31.

And now, the mingled ray she shoots, I decompose.  
Her antecedents, take for execrable! Gloze  
No whit on your premiss: let be, there was no worst  
Of degradation spared Fifine: ordained from first  
To last, in body and soul, for one life-long debauch,  
The Pariah of the North, the European Nautch!  
This, far from seek to hide, she puts in evidence  
Calmly, displays the brand, bids pry without offence  
Your finger on the place. You comment "Fancy us  
So operated on, maltreated, mangled thus!

Such torture in our case, had we survived an hour?  
Some other sort of flesh and blood must be, with power  
Appropriate to the vile, unsensitive, tough-thonged,  
In lieu of our fine nerve! Be sure, she was not wronged  
Too much: you must not think she winced at prick as  
we!"

Come, come, that's what you say, or would, were thoughts  
but free.

## 32.

Well then, thus much confessed, what wonder if there  
steal

Unchallenged to my heart the force of one appeal  
She makes, and justice stamp the sole claim she asserts?  
So absolutely good is truth, truth never hurts  
The teller, whose worst crime gets somehow grace,  
avowed.

To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud

“ Know all of me outside, the rest be emptiness  
For such as you ! I call attention to my dress,  
Coiffure, outlandish features, and memorable limbs,  
Piquant entreaty, all that eye-glance over-skims.  
Does this much pleasure ? Then, repay the pleasure, put  
Its price i’ the tambourine ! Do you seek farther ? Tut !  
I’m just my instrument,—sound hollow : mere smooth skin  
Stretched o’er gilt framework, I : rub-dub, nought else  
within—

Always, for such as you !—if I have use elsewhere,—  
If certain bells, now mute, can jingle, need you care ?  
Be it enough, there’s truth i’ the pleading, which comports  
With no word spoken out in cottages or courts,  
Since all I plead is ‘ Pay for just the sight you see,  
‘ And give no credit to another charm in me !’  
Do I say, like your Love ? ‘ To praise my face is well,  
‘ But, who would know my worth, must search my heart  
to tell !’

Do I say, like your Wife ? ‘ Had I passed in review  
‘ The produce of the globe, my man of men were—you ! ’  
Do I say, like your Helen ? ‘ Yield yourself up, obey  
‘ Implicitly, nor pause to question, to survey  
‘ Even the worshipful ! prostrate you at my shrine !  
‘ Shall you dare controvert what the world counts divine ?  
‘ Array your private taste, own liking of the sense,  
‘ Own longing of the soul, against the impudence  
‘ Of history, the blare and bullying of verse ?  
‘ As if man ever yet saw reason to disburse  
‘ The amount of what sense liked, soul longed for,—given,  
    devised  
‘ As love, forsooth,—until the price was recognized  
‘ As moderate enough by divers fellow-men !  
‘ Then, with his warrant safe that these would love too,  
    then,  
‘ Sure that particular gain implies a public loss,  
‘ And that no smile he buys but proves a slash across



The face, a stab into the side of somebody—  
Sure that, along with love's main-purchase, he will buy  
Up the whole stock of earth's uncharitableness,  
Envy and hatred,—then, decides he to profess  
His estimate of one, love had discerned, though dim  
To all the world beside: since what 's the world to  
him?"

Do I say, like your Queen of Egypt? 'Who foregoes  
' My cup of witchcraft—fault be on the fool! He knows  
' Nothing of how I pack my wine-press, turn its winch  
' Three-times-three, all the time to song and dance, nor  
flinch

' From charming on and on, till at the last I squeeze  
' Out the exhaustive drop that leaves behind mere lees  
' And dregs, vapidity, thought essence heretofore!  
' Sup of my sorcery, old pleasures please no more!  
' Be great, be good, love, learn, have potency of hand  
' Or heart or head,—what boots? You die, nor understand

‘ What bliss might be in life : you ate the grapes, but  
knew

‘ Never the taste of wine, such vintage as I brew !’

Do I say, like your Saint ? ‘ An exquisitest touch

‘ Bides in the birth of things : no after-time can much

‘ Enhance that fine, that faint, fugitive first of all !

‘ What colour paints the cup o’ the May-rose, like the  
small

‘ Suspicion of a blush which doubtfully begins ?

‘ What sound out-warbles brook, while, at the source, it  
wins

‘ That moss and stone dispart, allow its bubblings breathe ?

‘ What taste excels the fruit, just where sharp flavours  
sheathe

‘ Their sting, and let encroach the honey that allays ?

‘ And so with soul and sense ; when sanctity betrays

‘ First fear lest earth below seem real as heaven above,

‘ And holy worship, late, change soon to sinful love—

‘ Where is the plenitude of passion which endures

‘ Comparison with that, I ask of amateurs ?’

Do I say, like Elvire ” . . .

33.

(Your husband holds you fast

Will have you listen, learn your character at last !)

“ Do I say ?—like her mixed unrest and discontent,

Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent

So strangely, in the face, by sad smiles and gay tears,—

Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which endears,—

Say? ‘ As you loved me once, could you but love  
me now !

‘ Years probably have graved their passage on my brow,

‘ Lips turn more rarely red, eyes sparkle less than erst ;

‘ Such tribute body pays to time ; but, unamerced,

‘ The soul retains, nay, boasts old treasure multiplied.

‘ Though dew-prime flee,—mature at noonday, love defied

‘ Chance, the wind, change, the rain : love, strenuous all  
the more

‘ For storm, struck deeper root and choicer fruitage bore,  
‘ Despite the rocking world ; yet truth struck root in vain,  
‘ While tenderness bears fruit, you praise, not taste again.  
‘ Why? They are yours, which once were hardly yours,  
might go

‘ To grace another’s ground : and then—the hopes we know,  
‘ The fears we keep in mind !—when, ours to arbitrate,  
‘ Your part was to bow neck, bid fall decree of fate.  
‘ Then, O the knotty point—white-night’s work to revolve—  
‘ What meant that smile, that sigh ? Not Solon’s self could  
solve !

‘ Then, O the deep surmise what one word might express,  
‘ And if what sounded “No” may not have echoed “Yes!”  
‘ Then, such annoy could cause cold welcome, such acquit  
‘ Of rapture, that, refused the arm, hand touched the  
wrist !

‘ Now, what ’s a smile to you ? Poor candle that lights up  
‘ The decent household gloom which sends you out to sup.  
‘ A tear ? worse ! warns that health requires you keep aloof  
‘ From nuptial chamber, since rain penetrates the roof !  
‘ For all is got and gained, inalienably safe,  
‘ Your own, and, so, despised ; more worth has any waif  
‘ Or stray from neighbour’s pale : pouch that,—’tis pleasure,  
    pride,  
‘ Novelty, property, and larceny beside !  
‘ Preposterous thought ! to find no value fixed in things,  
‘ To covet all you see, hear, dream of, till fate brings  
‘ About that, what you want, you get ; then comes a  
    change.  
‘ Give you the sun to keep, forthwith must fancy range :  
‘ A goodly lamp, no doubt,—yet might you catch her hair  
‘ And capture, as she frisks, the fen-fire dancing there !  
‘ What do I say ? at least a meteor ’s half in heaven ;  
‘ Provided filth but shine, my husband hankers even

' After putridity that's phosphorescent, cribs  
 ' The rustic's tallow-rush, makes spoil of urchins' squibs,  
 ' In short prefers to me—chaste, temperate, serene—  
 ' What sputters green and blue, this fizzig called Fifine!' ”

## 34.

So all your sex mistake! Strange that so plain a  
 fact  
 Should raise such dire debate! Few families were  
 racked  
 By torture self-supplied, did Nature grant but this—  
 That women comprehend mental analysis !

## 35.

Elvire, do you recal when, years ago, our home  
 The intimation reached, a certain pride of Rome,  
 Authenticated piece, in the third, last and best  
 Manner,—whatever fools and connoisseurs contest,—

No particle disturbed by rude restorer's touch,  
The palaced picture-pearl, so long eluding clutch  
Of creditor, at last, the Rafael might—could we  
But come to terms—change lord, pass from the Prince  
to me?

I think you recollect my fever of a year :  
How the Prince would, and how he would not ; now,—  
too dear

That promise was, he made his grandsire so long since,  
Rather to boast “ I own a Rafael ” than “ am Prince ! ”  
And now, the fancy soothed—if really sell he must  
His birthright for a mess of pottage—such a thrust  
I' the vitals of the Prince were mollified by balm,  
Could he prevail upon his stomach to bear qualm,  
And bequeath Liberty (because a purchaser  
Was ready with the sum—a trifle !) yes, transfer  
His heart at all events to that land where, at least,  
Free institutions reign ! And so, its price increased

Five-fold (Americans are such importunates !)  
Soon must his Rafael start for the United States.  
O alternating bursts of hope and then despair !  
At last, the bargain's struck, I'm all but beggared,  
there

The Rafael faces me, in fine, no dream at all,  
My housemate, evermore to glorify my wall.  
A week I pass, before heart-palpitations sink,  
In gloating o'er my gain, so lately on the brink  
Of loss ; a fortnight more, I spend in Paradise :  
“ Was outline e'er so true, could colouring entice  
So calm, did harmony and quiet so avail ?  
How right, how resolute, the action tells the tale ! ”  
A month, I bid my friends congratulate their best :  
“ You happy Don ! ” (to me) “ The blockhead ! ” (to  
the rest)  
“ No doubt he thinks his daub original, poor dupe ! ”  
Then I resume my life : one chamber must not coop



My life in, though it boast a marvel like my prize.  
This year, I saunter past with unaverted eyes,  
Nay, loll and turn my back : perchance to overlook  
With relish, leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book.

## 36.

Imagine that a voice reproached me from its  
frame :

“ Here do I hang, and may ! Your Rafael, just the  
same,

'T is only you that change : no ecstacies of yore !

No purposed suicide distracts you any more ! ”

Prompt would my answer turn such frivolous attack :

“ You misappropriate sensations. What I lack,

And labour to obtain, is hoped and feared about

After a fashion ; what I once obtain, makes doubt,

Expectancy, old fret and fume, henceforward void.

But do I think to hold my havings unalloyed

By novel hope and fear, of fashion just as new,  
To correspond i' the scale? Nowise, I promise you !  
Mine you are, therefore mine will be, as fit to cheer  
My soul and glad my sense to-day as this-day-year.  
So, any sketch or scrap, pochade, caricature,  
Made in a moment, meant a moment to endure,  
I snap at, seize and then for ever throw aside  
And find you in your place. But if a servant cried  
' Fire in the gallery !'—methinks, were I engaged  
In Doré, elbow-deep, portfolios million-paged  
To the four winds would pack, sped by the heartiest  
curse  
Was ever launched from lip, to strew the universe ;  
While I would brave the best o' the burning, bear  
away  
Either my perfect piece in safety, or else stay  
And share its fate : if made a martyr, why repine ?  
Inextricably wed, such ashes mixed with mine !”

## 37.

For which I get the eye, the hand, the heart, the whole  
O' the wondrous wife again !

## 38.

But no, play out your rôle  
I' the pageant ! 'T is not fit your phantom leave the stage :  
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage  
Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance  
Claim to . . . equality ? nay, but predominance  
In physique o'er them all, where Helen heads the scene  
Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Fifine.  
How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint !  
My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,  
Inviolatè of life and worldliness and sin—  
Fettered, I hold my flower, her own cup's weight would win  
From off the tall slight stalk a-top of which she turns  
And trembles, makes appeal to one who roughly earns

Her thanks instead of blame, (did lily only know),  
By thus constraining length of lily, letting snow  
Of cup-crown, that's her face, look from its guardian  
stake,

Superb on all that crawls beneath, and mutely make  
Defiance, with the mouth's white movement of disdain,  
To all that stoops, retires and hovers round again !  
How windingly the limbs delay to lead up, reach  
Where, crowned, the head waits calm : as if reluctant,  
each,

That eye should traverse quick such lengths of loveliness,  
From feet, which just are found embedded in the  
dress

Deep swathed about with folds and flowings virginal,  
Up to the pleated breasts, rebellious 'neath their pall,  
As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep not death,  
Must melt and must release ; whereat, from the fine  
sheath,

The flower-cup-crown starts free, the face is uncon-  
cealed,

And what shall now divert, once the sweet face revealed,  
From all I loved so long, so lingeringly left ?

## 39.

Because indeed your face fits into just the cleft  
O' the heart of me, Elvire, makes right and whole once  
more

All that was half itself without you ! As before,  
My truant in its place ! Because e'en sea-shells yearn,  
Plundered by any chance : would have their pearl return,  
Let negligently slip away into the wave !

Never may they desist, those eyes so grey and grave,  
From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within !  
And, would you humour me ? I dare to ask, unpin  
The web of that brown hair ! O'erwash o' the sudden, but  
As promptly, too, disclose, on either side, the jut

Of alabaster brow ! So part, those rillets dyed  
Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each  
side  
O' the rock-top, pushed by Spring !

40.

“ And where i' the world is all  
This wonder, I detail so trippingly, espied ?  
Your mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed  
Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still,  
Loving,—a certain grace yet lingers, if I will,—  
But all this wonder, where ? ”

41.

Why, where but in the sense  
And soul of me, the judge of Art ? Art-evidence,  
That thing was, is, might be ; but no more thing itself,  
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,

The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear,—  
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear,  
Mine henceforth, ever mine !

42.

But if I would re-trace  
Effect, in Art, to cause,—corroborate, erase  
What 's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain  
By fact which gave it birth ? I re-peruse in vain  
The verse, I fail to find that vision of delight  
I' the Razzi's lost-profile, eye-edge so exquisite.  
And, music : what ? that burst of pillared cloud by day  
And pillared fire by night, was product, must we say,  
Of modulating just, by enharmonic change,—  
The augmented sixth resolved,—from out the straighter  
range  
Of D sharp minor,—leap of disimprisoned thrall,—  
Into thy light and life, D major natural ?

## 43.

Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart ?

I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart

By help of the outside face,—a reason for our wild

Diversity in choice,—why each grows reconciled

To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask :

Material meant to yield,—did nature ply her task

As artist should,—precise the features of the soul ;

Which, if in any case they found expression, whole

I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display

A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.

Never shall I believe any two souls were made

Similar ; granting, then, each soul of every grade

Was meant to be itself, and in itself complete,

And, in completion, good,—nay, best o' the kind,—as meet

Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond

With inward substance,—flesh, the dress which soul has

donned,



Exactly reproduce,—were only justice done  
Inside and outside too,—types perfect everyone.  
How happens it that here we meet a mystery  
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why  
Either is each soul made imperfect, and deserves  
As rude a face to match; or else a bungler swerves,  
And nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,  
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite,  
—Here too much, there too little,—makes each face, more  
or less,  
Retire from beauty, and approach to ugliness?  
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to  
success,  
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,  
Evidence, to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm  
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul  
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the  
whole

O' the grey, and, free again, be fire?—of worth the same,  
Howe'er produced, for, great or little, flame is flame.  
A mystery, whereof solution is to seek.

## 44.

I find it in the fact that each soul, just as weak  
Its own way as its fellow,—departure from design  
As flagrant in the flesh,—goes striving to combine  
With what shall right the wrong, the under or above  
The standard : supplement unloveliness by love.  
—Ask Plato else ! And this corroborates the sage,  
That Art,—which I may style the love of loving, rage  
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of  
things  
For truth's sake, whole and sole, nor any good, truth  
brings  
The knower, seer, feeler, beside,—instinctive Art  
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part

However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire  
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.  
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,  
Contributes to defect, toils on till,—*fiat lux*,—  
There 's the restored, the prime, the individual type !

## 45.

Look, for example now ! This piece of broken pipe  
(Some shipman's solace erst) shall act as crayon ; and  
What tablet better serves my purpose than the sand ?  
—Smooth slab whereon I draw, no matter with what  
skill,  
A face, and yet another, and yet another still.  
There lie my three prime types of beauty !

## 46.

Laugh your best !

“ Exaggeration and absurdity ? ” Confessed !

Yet, what may that face mean, no matter for its nose,  
A yard long, or its chin, a foot short?

47.

“ You suppose,  
Horror? ” Exactly ! What 's the odds if, more or less  
By yard or foot, the features do manage to express  
Such meaning in the main? Were I of Gerôme's  
force,  
Nor feeble as you see, quick should my crayon course  
O'er outline, curb, excite, till,—so completion speeds  
With Gerôme well at work,—observe how brow recedes,  
Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,  
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp  
stare  
Announces ; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,  
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave :  
elate

Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend  
 All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end.  
 Retrenchment and addition effect a masterpiece,  
 Not change i' the motive : here diminish, there increase—  
 And who wants Horror, has it.

48.

Who wants some other show  
 Of soul, may seek elsewhere—this second of the row ?  
 What does it give for germ, monadic mere intent  
 Of mind in face, faint first of meanings ever meant ?  
 Why, possibly, a grin, that, strengthened, grows a laugh ;  
 That, softened, leaves a smile ; that, tempered, bids you  
     quaff  
 At such a magic cup as English Reynolds once  
 Compounded : for the witch pulls out of you response  
 Like Garrick's to Thalia, however due may be  
 Your homage claimed by that stiff-stoled Melpomene !

## 49.

And just this one face more ! Pardon the bold  
pretence !

May there not lurk some hint, struggle toward evidence  
In that compressed mouth, those strained nostrils,  
steadfast eyes

Of utter passion, absolute self-sacrifice,  
Which,—could I but subdue the wild grotesque, refine  
That bulge of brow, make blunt that nose's aquiline,  
And let, although compressed, a point of pulp appear  
I' the mouth,—would give at last the portrait of  
Elvire ?

## 50.

Well, and if so succeed hand-practice on awry  
Preposterous art-mistake, shall soul-proficiency  
Despair,—when exercised on nature, which at worst  
Always implies success,—however crossed and curst

By failure,—such as art would emulate in vain ?  
Shall any soul despair of setting free again  
Trait after trait, until the type as wholly start  
Forth, visible to sense, as that minutest part,  
(Whate'er the chance) which first arresting eye, warned soul  
That, under wrong enough and ravage, lay the whole  
O' the loveliness it "loved"—I take the accepted phrase ?

## 51.

So I account for tastes : each chooses, none gainsays  
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,  
A hell for all beside. You can but crown the brim  
O' the cup ; if it be full, what matters less or more ?  
Let each, i' the world, amend his love, as I, o' the shore,  
My sketch, and the result as undisputed be !  
Their handiwork to them, and my Elvire to me :  
—Result more beautiful than beauty's self, when lo,  
What was my Rafael turns my Michelagnolo !

## 52.

For, we two boast, beside our pearl, a diamond.  
I' the palace-gallery, the corridor beyond,  
Upheaves itself a marble, a magnitude man-shaped  
As snow might be. One hand,—the Master's,—smoothed  
and scraped  
That mass, he hammered on and hewed at, till he  
hurled  
Life out of death, and left a challenge : for the world,  
Death still,—since who shall dare, close to the image, say  
If this be purposed Art, or mere mimetic play  
Of Nature ?—wont to deal with crag or cloud, as stuff  
To fashion novel forms, like forms we know, enough  
For recognition, but enough unlike the same,  
To leave no hope ourselves may profit by her game ;  
Death therefore to the world. Step back a pace  
or two !  
And then, who dares dispute the gradual birth its due



Of breathing life, or breathless immortality,  
Where out she stands, and yet stops short, half bold,  
half shy,

Hesitates on the threshold of things, since partly blent  
With stuff she needs must quit, her native element  
I' the mind o' the Master,—what's the creature, dear-  
divine

Yet earthly-awful too, so manly-feminine,  
Pretends this white advance? What startling brain-escape  
Of Michelagnolo takes elemental shape?

I think he meant the daughter of the old man o' the sea,  
Emerging from her wave, goddess Eidotheé—

She who, in elvish sport, spite with benevolence  
Mixed Mab-wise up, must needs instruct the Hero whence  
Salvation dawns o'er that mad misery of his isle.

Yes, she imparts to him, by what a pranksome wile  
He may surprise her sire, asleep beneath a rock,  
When he has told their tale, amid his web-foot flock

Of sea-beasts, "fine fat seals with bitter breath!" laughs she  
At whom she likes to save, no less : Eidotheé,  
Whom you shall never face evolved, in earth, in air,  
In wave ; but, manifest i' the soul's domain, why, there  
She ravishingly moves to meet you, all through aid  
O' the soul ! Bid shine what should, dismiss into the shade  
What should not be,—and there triumphs the paramount  
Emprise o' the Master ! But, attempt to make account  
Of what the sense, without the soul perceives ? I bought  
That work—(despite plain proof, whose hand it was had  
wrought

I' the rough : I think we trace the tool, of triple-tooth,  
Here, there and everywhere)—bought dearly that uncouth  
Unwieldy bulk, for just ten dollars — "Bulk, would  
fetch—

Converted into lime—some five pauls !" grinned a wretch,  
Who, bound on business, paused to hear the bargaining,  
And would have pitied me "but for the fun o' the thing !"

## 53.

Shall such a wretch be—you? Must—while I show

Elvire

Shaming all other forms, seen as I see her here

I' the soul,—this other-you perversely look outside,

And ask me, “where i' the world is charm to be descried

I' the tall thin personage, with paled eye, pensive face,

Any amount of love, and some remains of grace?”

See yourself in my soul!

## 54.

And what a world for each

Must somehow be i' the soul,—accept that mode of  
speech,—

Whether an aura gird the soul, wherein it seems

To float and move, a belt of all the glints and gleams

It struck from out that world, its weaklier fellows found

So dead and cold; or whether these not so much surround,

As pass into the soul itself, add worth to worth,  
As wine enriches blood, and straightway send it forth,  
Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity,  
That 's battle without end.

## 55.

I search but cannot see

What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it tries  
Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories  
Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own  
For ever, by some mode whereby shall be made known  
The gain of every life. Death reads the title clear—  
What each soul for itself conquered from out things here :  
Since, in the seeing soul, all worth lies, I assert,—  
And nought i' the world, which, save for soul that sees,  
inert  
Was, is, and would be ever,—stuff for transmuting,—null  
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful—

But, touched aright, prompt yields each particle, its  
tongue

Of elemental flame,—no matter whence flame sprung  
From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,  
So long as soul has power to make them burn, express  
What lights and warms henceforth, leaves only ash  
behind,

Howe'er the chance : if soul be privileged to find  
Food so soon that, at first snatch of eye, suck of breath,  
It shall absorb pure life : or, rather, meeting death  
I' the shape of ugliness, by fortunate recoil  
So put on its resource, it finds therein a foil  
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response  
To ugliness and death,—creation for the nonce.

## 56.

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,  
Through evocation out of that which, on the whole,

Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment, at best,  
And—what, at worst, save failure to spit at and detest?—  
—Through transference of all, achieved in visible things,  
To rest, secure from wrong, mid mere imaginings—  
Through ardour to bring help just where completion halts,  
Do justice to the purpose, ignore the slips and faults—  
And, last, not least, with stark deformity through fight  
Which wrings thence, at the end, precise its opposite.  
I praise the loyalty o' the scholar,—stung by taunt  
Of fools “Does this evince thy Master they so vaunt?  
Did he then perpetrate the plain abortion here?”—  
Who cries “His work am I! full fraught by him, I  
clear

His fame from each result of accident and time,  
And thus restore his work to its fresh morning-prime:  
Not daring touch the mass of marble, fools deride,  
But putting my idea in plaster by its side,  
His, since mine; I, he made, vindicate who made me!”

## 57.

For, you must know, I too achieved Eidotheé,  
In silence and by night—dared justify the lines  
Plain to my soul, although, to sense, that triple-tine's  
Achievement halt half-way, break down, or leave a blank.  
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank !  
Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes—  
That one at least was left who, born to recognize  
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked, that night,  
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite  
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more ;  
And then,—for at one blow, its fragments strewed the  
floor,—  
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore.

## 58.

And, even as I hold and have Eidotheé,  
I say, I cannot think that gains,—which would not be

Except a special soul had gained them,—that such gain  
Can ever be estranged, do aught but appertain  
Immortally, by right firm, indefeasible,  
To who performed the feat, through God's grace and man's  
will !  
Gain, never shared by those who practised with earth's  
stuff,  
And spoiled whate'er they touched, leaving its roughness  
rough,  
Its blankness bare, and, when the ugliness opposed,  
Either struck work or laughed "He doted or he dozed !"

## 59.

While, oh, how all the more will love become intense  
Hereafter, when "to love" means yearning to dispense,  
Each soul, its own amount of gain through its own  
mode  
Of practising with life, upon some soul which owed



Its treasure, all diverse and yet in worth the same,  
To new work and changed way ! Things furnish you  
    rose-flame,

Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow more than  
    needs,

For me, I nowise doubt ; why doubt a time succeeds  
When each one may impart, and each receive, both share  
The chemic secret, learn,—where I lit force, why there  
You drew forth lambent pity,—where I found only food  
For self-indulgence, you still blew a spark at brood  
I' the greyest ember, stopped not till self-sacrifice imbued  
Heaven's face with flame ? What joy, when each may  
    supplement

The other, changing each, as changed, till, wholly blent,  
The old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,  
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white !

Exemplifying law, apparent even now

In the eternal progress,—love's law, which I avow

And thus would formulate : each soul lives, longs and  
works

For itself, by itself, because a lodestar lurks,  
An other than itself,—in whatsoe'er the niche  
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich  
May grasp the Gulliver : or it, or he, or she—

*Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene,—*

(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it  
fixed !

So soft it says,—God, man, or both together mixed !)  
This, guessed at through the flesh, by parts which prove  
the whole,

This constitutes the soul discernible by soul  
—Elvire, by me !

60.

“ And then ”—(so you permit remain  
This hand upon my arm !—your cheek dried, if you deign,

Choosing my shoulder)—“then!”—(Stand up for, boldly  
state

The objection in its length and breadth!) “You abdicate,  
With boast yet on your lip, soul’s empire, and accept  
The rule of sense; the Man, from monarch’s throne has  
stept—

Leapt, rather, at one bound, to base, and there lies,  
Brute.

You talk of soul,—how soul, in search of soul to suit,  
Must needs review the sex, the army, rank and file  
Of womankind, report no face nor form so vile  
But that a certain worth, by certain signs, may thence  
Evolve itself and stand confessed—to soul—by sense.  
Sense? Oh, the loyal bee endeavours for the hive!  
Disinterested hunts the flower-field through, alive  
Not one mean moment, no,—suppose on flower he  
light,—

To his peculiar drop, petal-dew perquisite,

Matter-of-course snatched snack : unless he taste, how  
try ?

This, light on tongue-tip laid, allows him pack his  
thigh,

Transport all he counts prize, provision for the comb,

Food for the future day,—a banquet, but at home !

Soul ? Ere you reach Fifine's, some flesh may be to pass !

That bombéd brow, that eye, a kindling chrysopras,

Beneath its stiff black lash, inquisitive how speeds

Each functionary limb, how play of foot succeeds,

And how you let escape or duly sympathize

With gastro-knemian grace,—true, your soul tastes and  
tries,

And trifles time with these, but, fear not, will arrive

At essence in the core, bring honey home to hive,

Brain-stock and heart-stuff both—to strike objectors  
dumb—

Since only soul affords the soul fit pabulum !

Be frank for charity ! Who is it you deceive—  
Yourself or me or God, with all this make-believe ? ”

## 61.

And frank I will respond as you interrogate.

Ah, Music, wouldst thou help ! Words struggle with the  
weight

So feebly of the False, thick element between  
Our soul, the True, and Truth ! which, but that intervene  
False shows of things, were reached as easily by  
thought

Reducible to word, as now by yearnings wrought  
Up with thy fine, free force, oh Music, that canst thrid,  
Electrically win a passage through the lid  
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,  
Hardly transpierce as thou ! Not dissipate, thou deign'st,  
So much as tricksily elude what words attempt  
To heave away, i' the mass, and let the soul, exempt

From all that vapoury obstruction, view, instead  
Of glimmer underneath, a glory overhead.  
Not feebly, like our phrase, against the barrier go  
In suspirative swell the authentic notes I know,  
By help whereof, I would our souls were found without  
The pale, above the dense and dim which breeds the  
doubt !

But Music, dumb for you, withdraws her help from me ;  
And, since to weary words recourse again must be,  
At least permit they rest their burthen here and there,  
Music-like : cover space ! My answer,—need you care  
If it exceed the bounds, reply to questioning  
You never meant should plague ? Once fairly on the wing,  
Let me flap far and wide !

62.

For this is just the time,  
The place, the mood in you and me, when all things chime,

Clash forth life's common chord, whence, list how there  
ascend

Harmonics far and faint, till our perception end,—  
Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale  
Embracing what we know and feel and are ! How fail  
To find or, better, lose your question, in this quick  
Reply which nature yields, ample and catholic ?  
For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you  
see,

The village-precinct ; sun sets mild on Saint-Marie—  
We only catch the spire, and yet I seem to know  
What 's hid i' the turn o' the hill: how all the graves must  
glow

Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,  
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss  
Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow, crisp bead-blooms  
Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, mid the  
tombs,

With prattle good as song, amuse the dead awhile,  
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile !

## 63.

Bid them goodbye before last friend has sung and  
supped !

Because we pick our path and need our eyes,—abrupt  
Descent enough,—but here 's the beach, and there 's the  
bay,

And, opposite, the streak of Isle Noirmoutier.

Thither the waters tend ; they freshen as they haste,  
At feel o' the night-wind, though, by cliff and cliff  
embraced,

This breadth of blue retains its self-possession still ;

As you and I intend to do, who take our fill

Of sights and sounds—soft sound, the countless hum and  
skip

Of insects we disturb, and that good fellowship



Of rabbits, our foot-fall sends huddling, each to hide  
He best knows how and where ; and what whirred past,  
wings wide ?

That was an owl, their young may justlier apprehend !  
Though you refuse to speak, your beating heart, my friend,  
I feel against my arm,—though your bent head forbids  
A look into your eyes, yet, on my cheek, their lids  
That ope and shut, soft send a silken thrill the same.  
Well, out of all and each these nothings, comes—what came  
Often enough before, the something that would aim  
Once more at the old mark : the impulse to at last  
Succeed where hitherto was failure in the past,  
And yet again essay the adventure. Clearlier sings  
No bird to its couched corpse, “ Into the truth of things—  
Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou, and remain ! ”

64.

“ That rise into the true out of the false—explain ? ”

May an example serve? In yonder bay, I bathed,  
This sunny morning : swam my best, then hung, half  
swathed

With chill, and half with warmth, i' the channel's midmost  
deep :

You know how one—not treads, but stands in water?  
Keep

Body and limbs below, hold head back, uplift chin,  
And, for the rest, leave care ! If brow, eyes, mouth,  
should win

Their freedom,—excellent ! If they must brook the surge,  
No matter though they sink, let but the nose emerge.

So, all of me in brine lay soaking : did I care

One jot? I kept alive by man's due breath of air

I' the nostrils, high and dry. At times, o'er these would run

The ripple, even wash the wavelet,—for the sun

Tempted advance, no doubt : and always flash of froth,

Fish-outbreak, bubbling by, would find me nothing loth

To rise and look around ; then all was overswept  
With dark and death at once. But trust the old adept !  
Back went again the head, a merest motion made,  
Fin-fashion, either hand, and nostril soon conveyed  
The news that light and life were still in reach as erst :  
Always the last and,—wait and watch,—sometimes the  
first.

Try to ascend breast-high? wave arms wide free of tether?  
Be in the air and leave the water altogether?  
Under went all again, till I resigned myself  
To only breathe the air, that 's footed by an elf,  
And only swim the water, that 's native to a fish.  
But there is no denying that, ere I curbed my wish,  
And schooled my restive arms, salt entered mouth and  
eyes

Often enough—sun, sky, and air so tantalize !  
Still, the adept swims, this accorded, that denied ;  
Can always breathe, sometimes see and be satisfied !

65.

I liken to this play o' the body, fruitless strife  
To slip the sea and hold the heaven, my spirit's life  
'Twixt false, whence it would break, and true, where it  
would bide.

I move in, yet resist, am upborne every side  
By what I beat against, an element too gross  
To live in, did not soul duly obtain her dose  
Of life-breath, and inhale from truth's pure plenitude  
Above her, snatch and gain enough to just illude  
With hope that some brave bound may baffle evermore  
The obstructing medium, make who swam henceforward  
soar :

—Gain scarcely snatched when, foiled by the very effort,  
sowse,

Underneath ducks the soul, her truthward yearnings dowse  
Deeper in falsehood ! ay, but fitted less and less  
To bear in nose and mouth old briny bitterness

Proved alien more and more : since each experience  
proves

Air—the essential good, not sea, wherein who moves  
Must thence, in the act, escape, apart from will or wish.  
Move a mere hand to take waterweed, jelly-fish,  
Upward you tend ! And yet our business with the sea  
Is not with air, but just o' the water, watery :  
We must endure the false, no particle of which  
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a pitch  
Above it, find our head reach truth, while hands explore  
The false below : so much while here we bathe,—no  
more !

66.

Now, there is one prime point (hear and be edified !)  
One truth more true for me than any truth beside—  
To-wit, that I am I, who have the power to swim,  
The skill to understand the law whereby each limb

May bear to keep immersed, since, in return, made sure  
That its mere movement lifts head clean through  
coverture.

By practice with the false, I reach the true ? Why, thence  
It follows, that the more I gain self-confidence,  
Get proof I know the trick, can float, sink, rise, at will,  
The better I submit to what I have the skill  
To conquer in my turn, even now, and by and by  
Leave wholly for the land, and there laugh, shake me dry  
To last drop, saturate with noonday—no need more  
Of wet and fret, plagued once : on Pornic's placid  
shore,

Abundant air to breathe, sufficient sun to feel !  
Meantime I buoy myself : no whit my senses reel  
When over me there breaks a billow ; nor, elate  
Too much by some brief taste, I quaff intemperate  
The air, o'ertop breast-high the wave-environment.  
Full well I know, the thing I grasp, as if intent

To hold,—my wandering wave,—will not be grasped at all :  
The solid-seeming grasped, the handful great or small  
Must go to nothing, glide through fingers fast enough ;  
But none the less, to treat liquidity as stuff—  
Though failure—certainly succeeds beyond its aim  
Sends head above, far past the thing hands miss, the same.

## 67.

So with this wash o' the world, wherein life-long we  
drift ;

We push and paddle through the foam by making shift  
To breathe above at whiles when, after deepest duck  
Down underneath the show, we put forth hand and pluck  
At what seems somehow like reality—a soul.

I catch at this and that, to capture and control,  
Presume I hold a prize, discover that my pains  
Are run to nought : my hands are baulked, my head  
regains

The surface where I breathe and look about, a space.

The soul that helped me mount? Swallowed up in the  
race

O' the tide, come who knows whence, gone gaily who  
knows where !

I thought the prize was mine ; I flattered myself there.

It did its duty, though : I felt it, it felt me ;

Or, where I look about and breathe, I should not be.

The main point is—the false fluidity was bound

Acknowledge that it frothed o'er substance, nowise found

Fluid, but firm and true. Man, outcast, "howls,"—at  
rods?—

If "sent in playful spray a-shivering to his gods !"

Childishest childe, man makes thereby no bad exchange.

Stay with the flat-fish, thou ! We like the upper range

Where the "gods" live, perchance the dæmons also  
dwell,

Where operates a Power, which every throb and swell



Of human heart invites that human soul approach,  
"Sent" near and nearer still, however "spray" encroach  
On "shivering" flesh below, to altitudes, which gained,  
Evil proves good, wrong right, obscurity explained,  
And "howling" childishness. Whose howl have we to  
thank,

If all the dogs 'gan bark and puppies whine, till sank  
Each yelper's tail 'twixt legs? for Huntsman Commonsense  
Came to the rescue, caused prompt thwack of thong  
dispense

Quiet i' the kennel; taught that ocean might be blue,  
And rolling and much more, and yet the soul have, too,  
Its touch of God's own flame, which He may so expand  
"Who measuréd the waters i' the hollow of His hand"  
That ocean's self shall dry, turn dew-drop in respect  
Of all-triumphant fire, matter with intellect  
Once fairly matched; bade him who egged on hounds to bay,  
Go curse, i' the poultry yard, his kind: "there let him lay"

The swan's one addled egg : which yet shall put to use,  
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose !

## 68.

No, I want sky not sea, prefer the larks to shrimps,  
And never dive so deep but that I get a glimpse  
O' the blue above, a breath of the air around. Elvire,  
I seize—by catching at that melted beryl here,  
The tawny wavelet just has trickled off,—Fifine !  
Did not we two trip forth to just enjoy the scene,  
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,  
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage—  
Dabble, and there an end, with foam and froth o'er face,  
Till suddenly Fifine suggested change of place ?  
Now we taste æther, scorn the wave, and inter-  
change apace  
No ordinary thoughts, but such as evidence  
The cultivated mind in both ! On what pretence

Are you and I to sneer at who lent help to hand,  
And gave the lucky lift?

69.

Still sour? I understand!

One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan—  
That Woman does the work: I waive the help of  
Man.

“Why should experiment be tried with only waves,  
When solid spars float round? Still some Thalassia saves  
Too pertinaciously, as though no Triton, bluff  
As e’er blew brine from conch, were free to help  
enough!

Surely, to recognize a man, his mates serve best!  
Why is there not the same or greater interest  
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray?  
Were recognition just your object, as you say,  
Amid this element o’ the false.”

## 70.

We come to terms.

I need to be proved true ; and nothing so confirms  
One's faith in the prime point that one's alive, not dead,  
In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read,  
As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,  
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend  
His passage : " You that breathe, along with us the  
ghosts ? "

Here, why must it still be a woman that accosts ?

## 71.

Because, one woman's worth, in that respect, such  
hairy hosts

Of the other sex and sort ! Men ? Say you have the  
power

To make them yours, rule men, throughout life's little  
hour,

According to the phrase ; what follows? Men, you make,  
By ruling them, your own : each man for his own sake  
Accepts you as his guide, avails him of what worth  
He apprehends in you to sublimate his earth  
With fire : content, if so you convoy him through night,  
That you shall play the sun, and he, the satellite,  
Pilfer your light and heat and virtue, starry pelf,  
While, caught up by your course, he turns upon himself.  
Women rush into you, and there remain absorbed.  
Beside, 't is only men completely formed, full-orbed,  
Are fit to follow track, keep pace, illustrate so  
The leader : any sort of woman may bestow  
Her atom on the star, or clod she counts for such,—  
Each little making less bigger by just that much.  
Women grow you, while men depend on you at best.  
And what dependence ! Bring and put him to the test,  
Your specimen disciple, a handbreadth separate  
From you, he almost seemed to touch before ! Abate

Complacency you will, I judge, at what's divulged !  
Some flabbiness you fixed, some vacancy out-bulged,  
Some—much—nay, all, perhaps, the outward man 's your  
work :

But, inside man ?—find him, wherever he may lurk,  
And where 's a touch of you in his true self ?

## 72.

I wish

Some wind would waft this way a glassy bubble-fish  
O' the kind the sea inflates, and show you, once detached  
From wave . . . or no, the event is better told than  
watched :

Still may the thing float free, globose and opaline  
All over, save where just the amethysts combine  
To blue their best, rim-round the sea-flower with a tinge  
Earth's violet never knew ! Well, 'neath that gem-tipped  
fringe,

A head lurks—of a kind—that acts as stomach too ;  
Then comes the emptiness which out the water blew  
So big and belly-like, but, dry of water drained,  
Withers away nine-tenths. Ah, but a tenth remained !  
That was the creature's self : no more akin to sea,  
Poor rudimental head and stomach, you agree,  
Than sea 's akin to who dips yonder his red edge.

## 73.

But take the rillet, ends a race o'er yonder ledge  
O' the fissured cliff, to find its fate in smoke below !  
Disengage that, and ask—what news of life, you know  
It led, that long lone way, through pasture, plain and waste?  
All 's gone to give the sea ! no touch of earth, no taste  
Of air, reserved to tell how rushes used to bring  
The butterfly and bee, and fisher-bird that 's king  
O' the purple kind, about the snow-soft, silver-sweet  
Infant of mist and dew ; only these atoms fleet,

Embittered evermore, to make the sea one drop  
More big thereby—if thought keep count where sense  
must stop.

## 74.

The full-blown ingrate, mere recipient of the brine,  
That takes all and gives nought, is Man ; the feminine  
Rillet that, giving all and taking nought in turn,  
Goes headlong to her death i' the sea, without concern  
For the old inland life, snow-soft and silver-clear,  
That's woman—typified from Fifine to Elvire.

## 75.

Then, how diverse the modes prescribed to who would deal  
With either kind of creature ! 'T is Man, you seek to seal  
Your very own ? Resolve, for first step, to discard  
Nine-tenths of what you are ! To make, you must be  
marred,—



To raise your race, must stoop,—to teach them aught,  
must learn

Ignorance, meet half-way what most you hope to  
spurn

I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the  
thought

And vulgarize the word, and see the deed be brought

To look like nothing done with any such intent

As teach men—though perchance it teach, by accident !

So may you master men : assured that if you show

One point of mastery, departure from the low

And level,—head or heart-revolt at long disguise,

Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities,—

If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word

Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,

His chance of capture 's gone. Success means, they  
may snuff,

Examine, and report,—a brother, sure enough,

Disports him in brute-guise ; for skin is truly skin,  
Horns, hoofs are hoofs and horns, and all, outside and in,  
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beasts resigned  
May follow, made a prize in honest pride, behind  
One of themselves and not creation's upstart lord !  
Well, there 's your prize i' the pound—much joy may it  
afford

My Indian ! Make survey and tell me,—was it worth  
You acted part so well, went all-fours upon on earth  
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to  
pass  
That stags should deign eat hay when winter stints them  
grass ?

76.

So much for men, and how disguise may make them  
mind  
Their master. But you have to deal with womankind ?

Abandon stratagem for strategy ! Cast quite  
The vile disguise away, try truth clean-opposite  
Such creep-and-crawl, stand forth all man and, might it  
chance,

Somewhat of angel too !—whate'er inheritance,  
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,  
Lay claim to ! Your best self revealed at uttermost,—  
That 's the wise way o' the strong ! And e'en should  
falsehood tempt

The weaker sort to swerve,—at least the lie 's exempt  
From slur, that 's loathlier still, of aiming to debase  
Rather than elevate its object. Mimic grace,  
Not make deformity your mask ! Be sick by stealth,  
Nor traffic with disease—malingering in health !  
No more of : “Countrymen, I boast me one like you—  
My lot, the common strength, the common weakness too !  
I think the thoughts, you think ; and if I have the knack  
Of fitting thoughts to words, you peradventure lack,

Envy me not the chance, yourselves more fortunate !  
Many the loaded ship self-sunk through treasure-freight,  
Many the pregnant brain brings never child to birth,  
Many the great heart bursts beneath its girdle-girth !  
Be mine the privilege to supplement defect,  
Give dumbness voice, and let the labouring intellect  
Find utterance in word, or possibly in deed !  
What though I seem to go before? 't is you that lead !  
I follow what I see so plain—the general mind  
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,  
Which dwarfs the unit—me—to insignificance !  
Halt you, I stop forthwith,—proceed, I too advance !”

## 77.

Ay, that 's the way to take with men you wish to lead,  
Instruct and benefit. Small prospect you succeed  
With women so ! Be all that 's great and good and wise,  
August, sublime—swell out your frog the right ox-size—

He 's buoyed like a balloon, to soar, not burst, you 'll see !  
The more you prove yourself, less fear the prize will flee  
The captor. Here you start after no pompous stag  
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag  
Of bray, and ramp of hoof ; you have not to subdue  
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you !  
'T is rather with . . .

## 78.

Ah, thanks ! quick—where the dipping disk  
Shows red against the rise and fall o' the fin ! there frisk  
In shoal the—porpoises ? Dolphins, they shall and must  
Cut through the freshening clear—dolphins, my instance  
just !

'Tis fable, therefore truth : who has to do with these,  
Needs never practise trick of going hands and knees  
As beasts require. Art fain the fish to captivate ?  
Gather thy greatness round, Arion ! Stand in state,

As when the banqueting thrilled conscious—like a rose  
Throughout its hundred leaves at that approach it knows  
Of music in the bird—while Corinth grew one breast  
A-throb for song and thee ; nay, Periander pressed  
The Methymnæan hand, and felt a king indeed, and  
guessed

How Phœbus' self might give that great mouth of the gods  
Such a magnificence of song ! The pillar nods,  
Rocks roof, and trembles door, gigantic, post and jamb,  
As harp and voice rend air—the shattering dithyramb !  
So stand thou, and assume the robe that tingles yet  
With triumph ; strike the harp, whose every golden fret  
Still smoulders with the flame, was late at finger's end—  
So, standing on the bench o' the ship, let voice expend  
Thy soul, sing, unalloyed by meaner mode, thine own,  
The Orthian lay ; then leap from music's lofty throne,  
Into the lowest surge, make fearlessly thy launch !  
Whatever storm may threat, some dolphin will be staunch !

Whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea-thing  
Will surely rise to save, will bear—palpitating—  
One proud humility of love beneath its load—  
Stem tide, part wave, till both roll on, thy jewell'd road  
Of triumph, and the grim o' the gulph grow wonder-white  
I' the phosphorescent wake ; and still the exquisite  
Sea-thing stems on, saves still, palpitatingly thus,  
Lands safe at length its load of love at Tænarus,  
True woman-creature !

## 79.

Man? Ah, would you prove what power  
Marks man,—what fruit his tree may yield, beyond the  
sour

And stinted crab, he calls love-apple, which remains  
After you toil and moil your utmost,—all, love gains  
By lavishing manure?—try quite the other plan !  
And to obtain the strong true product of a man

Set him to hate a little ! Leave cherishing his root,  
And rather prune his branch, nip off the pettiest shoot  
Superfluous on his bough ! I promise, you shall learn  
By what grace came the goat, of all beasts else, to earn  
Such favor with the god o' the grape : 't was only he  
Who, browsing on its tops, first stung fertility  
Into the stock's heart, stayed much growth of tendril-twine,  
Some faintish flower, perhaps, but gained the indignant  
wine,

Wrath of the red press ! Catch the puniest of the kind—  
Man-animalcule, starved body, stunted mind,  
And, as you nip the blotch 'twixt thumb and finger-nail,  
Admire how heaven above and earth below avail  
No jot to soothe the mite, sore at God's prime offence  
In making mites at all,—coax from its impotence  
One virile drop of thought, or word, or deed, by strain  
To propagate for once—which nature rendered vain,  
Who lets first failure stay, yet cares not to record



Mistake that seems to cast opprobrium on the Lord !  
Such were the gain from love's best pains ! But let the elf  
Be touched with hate, because some real man bears him-  
self

Manlike in body and soul, and, since he lives, must thwart  
And furify and set a-fizz this counterpart  
O' the pismire that 's surprised to effervescence, if,  
By chance, black bottle come in contact with chalk cliff,  
Acid with alkali ! Then thrice the bulk, out blows  
Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits some rose !

## 80.

No—'t is ungainly work, the ruling men, at best !  
The graceful instinct 's right : 't is women stand confessed  
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,  
Takes nothing and gives all : Elvire, Fifine, 't is they  
Convince,—if little, much, no matter !—one degree  
The more, at least, convince unreasonable me

That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem  
And be not : if I dream, at least I know I dream.  
The falsity, beside, is fleeting : I can stand  
Still, and let truth come back,—your steadying touch of  
hand

Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid  
All on the move. Believe in me, at once you bid  
Myself believe that, since one soul has disengaged  
Mine from the shows of things, so much is fact : I waged  
No foolish warfare, then, with shades, myself a shade,  
Here in the world—may hope my pains will be repaid !  
How false things are, I judge : how changeable, I learn :  
When, where and how it is I shall see truth return,  
That I expect to know, because Fifine knows me !—  
How much more, if Elvire !

81.

“ And why not, only she ?

Since there can be for each, one Best, no more, such  
Best,

For body and mind of him, abolishes the rest  
O' the simply Good and Better. You please select Elvire  
To give you this belief in truth, dispel the fear  
Yourself are, after all, as false as what surrounds ;  
And why not be content ? When we two watched the  
rounds

The boatman made, 'twixt shoal and sandbank, yesterday,  
As, at dead slack of tide, he chose to push his way,  
With oar and pole, across the creek, and reach the isle  
After a world of pains—my word provoked your smile,  
Yet none the less deserved reply : ' 'T were wiser wait  
' The turn o' the tide, and find conveyance for his  
freight—

' How easily—within the ship to purpose moored,  
' Managed by sails, not oars ! But no,—the man 's  
allured

‘ By liking for the new and hard in his exploit !  
‘ First come shall serve ! He makes,—courageous and  
    adroit,—  
‘ The merest willow-leaf of boat do duty, bear  
‘ His merchandize across : once over, needs he care  
‘ If folk arrive by ship, six hours hence, fresh and  
    gay ? ’

No : he scorns commonplace, affects the unusual way ;  
And good Elvire is moored, with not a breath to flap  
The yards of her, no lift of ripple to o’erlap  
Keel, much less, prow. What care ? since here ’s a cockle-  
    shell,  
Fifine, that ’s taut and crank, and carries just as well  
Such seamanship as yours ! ”

82.

Alack, our life is lent,  
From first to last, the whole, for this experiment

Of proving what I say—that we ourselves are true !

I would there were one voyage, and then no more to do

But tread the firmland, tempt the uncertain sea no more.

I would we might dispense with change of shore for  
shore

To evidence our skill, demonstrate—in no dream

It was, we tided o'er the trouble of the stream.

I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip,—

Elvire, and not Fifine,—might test our seamanship.

But why expend one's breath to tell you, change of boat

Means change of tactics too? Come see the same  
afloat

To-morrow, all the change, new stowage fore and aft

O' the cargo ; then, to cross requires new sailor-craft !

To-day, one step from stern to bow keeps boat in trim :

To-morrow, some big stone,—or woe to boat and him !—

Must ballast both. That man stands for Mind, paramount

Throughout the adventure : ay, howe'er you make account,

'T is mind that navigates,—skips over, twists between  
The bales i' the boat,—now gives importance to the mean,  
And now abates the pride of life, accepts all fact,  
Discards all fiction,—steers Fifine, and cries, in the act,  
“Thou art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown !  
Wouldst tell no end of lies : I talk to smile or frown !  
Wouldst rob me : do men blame a squirrel, lithe and sly,  
For pilfering the nut, she adds to hoard ? Nor I.  
Elvire is true, as truth, honesty's self, alack !  
The worse ! too safe the ship, the transport there and  
back

Too certain ! one may loll and lounge and leave the helm,  
Let wind and tide do work : no fear that waves  
o'erwhelm

The steady-going bark, as sure to feel her way  
Blind-fold across, reach land, next year as yesterday !  
How can I but suspect, the true feat were to slip  
Down side, transfer myself to cockle-shell from ship,

And try if, trusting to sea-tracklessness, I class  
With those around whose breast grew oak and triple  
brass :

Who dreaded no degree of death, but, with dry eyes,  
Surveyed the turgid main and its monstrosities—  
And rendered futile so, the prudent Power's decree  
Of separate earth and disassociating sea ;  
Since, how is it observed, if impious vessels leap  
Across, and tempt a thing they should not touch—the deep ?  
(See Horace to the boat, wherein, for Athens bound,  
When Virgil must embark—Jove keep him safe and  
sound !—

The poet bade his friend start on the watery road,  
Much re-assured by this so comfortable ode.)

## 83.

Then, never grudge my poor Fifine her compliment !  
The rakish craft could slip her moorings in the tent,

And, hoisting every stitch of spangled canvas, steer  
Through divers rocks and shoals,—in fine, deposit here  
Your Virgil of a spouse, in Attica : yea, thrid  
The mob of men, select the special virtue hid  
In him, forsooth, and say—or rather, smile so sweet,  
“ Of all the multitude, you—I prefer to cheat !  
Are you for Athens bound ? I can perform the trip,  
Shove little pinnace off, while yon superior ship,  
The Elvire, refits in port ! ” So, off we push from beach  
Of Pornic town, and lo, ere eye can wink, we reach  
The Long Walls, and I prove that Athens is no dream,  
For there the temples rise ! they are, they nowise seem !  
Earth is not all one lie, this truth attests me true !  
Thanks therefore to Fifine ! Elvire, I’m back with you !  
Share in the memories ! Embark I trust we shall  
Together some fine day, and so, for good and all,  
Bid Pornic Town adieu,—then, just the strait to cross,  
And we reach harbour, safe, in Iostephanos !



## 84.

How quickly night comes ! Lo, already 'tis the land  
Turns sea-like ; overerept by grey, the plains expand,  
Assume significance ; while ocean dwindles, shrinks  
Into a pettier bound : its splash and plaint, methinks,  
Six steps away, how both retire, as if their part  
Were played, another force were free to prove her art,  
Protagonist in turn ! Are you unterrified ?  
All false, all fleeting too ! And nowhere things abide,  
And everywhere we strain that things should stay,—the one  
Truth, that ourselves are true !

## 85.

A word, and I have done.

Is it not just our hate of falsehood, fleetingness,  
And the mere part, things play, that constitutes express  
The inmost charm of this Fifine and all her tribe ?  
Actors ! We also act, but only they inscribe

Their style and title so, and preface, only they,  
Performance with "A lie is all we do or say."  
Wherein but there, can be the attraction, Falsehood's bribe,  
That wins so surely o'er to Fifine and her tribe  
The liking, nay the love of who hate Falsehood most,  
Except that these alone of mankind make their boast  
"Frankly, we simulate!" To feign, means—to have  
grace

And so get gratitude! This ruler of the race,  
Crowned, sceptred, stoled to suit,—'t is not that you detect  
The cobbler in the king, but that he makes effect  
By seeming the reverse of what you know to be  
The man, the mind, whole form, fashion, and quality.  
Mistake his false for true, one minute,—there 's an end  
Of the admiration! Truth, we grieve at or rejoice:  
'T is only falsehood, plain in gesture, look and voice,  
That brings the praise desired, since profit comes thereby.  
The histrionic truth is in the natural lie.

Because the man who wept the tears was, all the time,  
Happy enough ; because the other man, a-grime  
With guilt, was, at the least, as white as I and you ;  
Because the timid type of bashful maidhood, who  
Starts at her own pure shade, already numbers seven  
Born babes and, in a month, will turn their odd to  
even ;

Because the saucy prince would prove, could you unfurl  
Some yards of wrap, a meek and meritorious girl—  
Precisely as you see success attained by each  
O' the mimes, do you approve, not foolishly impeach  
The falsehood !

## 86.

'That 's the first o' the truths found : all things, slow  
Or quick i' the passage, come at last to that, you know !  
Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced  
To issue from within : truth, falsehood, are divorced

By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for  
The happy moment. Life means—learning to abhor  
The false, and love the true, truth treasured snatch by  
snatch,  
Waifs counted at their worth. And when with strays they  
match  
I' the parti-coloured world,—when, under foul, shines fair,  
And truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere  
I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,  
And no obstruction more affects this confidence,—  
When faith is ripe for sight,—why, reasonably, then  
Comes the great clearing-up. Wait threescore years and  
ten !

## 87.

Therefore I prize stage-play, the honest cheating ;  
thence  
The impulse pricked, when fife and drum bade Fair  
commence,

To bid you trip and skip, link arm in arm with me,  
Like husband and like wife, and so together see  
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage  
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.  
And if I started thence upon abstruser themes . . .  
Well, 't was a dream, pricked too !

## 88.

A poet never dreams :  
We prose-folk always do : we miss the proper duct  
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct  
The system, therefore ; mind, sound in a body sane,  
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein  
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,  
And leaves the rest alone. What ghosts do poets see ?  
What dæmons fear ? what man or thing misapprehend ?  
Unchoked, the channel 's flush, the fancy 's free to  
spend

Its special self aright in manner, time and place.

Never believe that who create the busy race

O' the brain, bring poetry to birth, such act performed,

Feel trouble them, the same, such residue as warmed

My prosy blood, this morn,—intrusive fancies, meant

For outbreak and escape by quite another vent !

Whence follows that, asleep, my dreamings oft exceed

The bound. But you shall hear.

89.

I smoked. The webs o' the weed,

With many a break i' the mesh, were floating to re-form

Cupola-wise above : chased thither by soft, warm

Inflow of air without ; since, I—of mind to muse, to  
clench

The gain of soul and body, got by their noon-day  
drench

In sun and sea,—I flung both frames o' the window wide,  
To soak my body still, and let soul soar beside.

In came the country sounds and sights and smells—that  
fine

Sharp needle in the nose from our fermenting wine !

In came a dragon-fly with whir and stir, then out,  
Off and away : in came,—kept coming, rather,—pout  
Succeeding smile, and take-away still close on give,—  
One loose long creeper-branch, tremblingly sensitive  
To risk, which blooms and leaves,—each leaf tongue-  
broad, each bloom

Mid-finger-deep,—must run by prying in the room  
Of one who loves and grasps and spoils and speculates.  
All, so far, plain enough to sight and sense : but, weights,  
Measures and numbers,—ah, could one apply such test  
To other visitants that came at no request  
Of who kept open house,—to fancies manifold  
From this four-cornered world, the memories new and old,

The antenatal prime experience—what know I?—  
The initiatory love preparing us to die—  
Such were a crowd to count, a sight to see, a prize  
To turn to profit, were but fleshly ears and eyes  
Able to cope with those o' the spirit !

90.

Therefore,—since  
Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may  
    evince  
Feeling like music,—mine, o'erburthened with each gift  
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift  
Its burthen to the back of some musician dead  
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead  
Of words, sought sounds, and saved for ever, in the same,  
Truth that escapes prose,—nay, puts poetry to shame.  
One reads the note, one strikes the key, one bids *record*  
The instrument—thanks for the veritable word !



And not in vain one cries : " O dead and gone away,  
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength become my stay,  
Thy record serve as well to register—I felt  
And knew thus much of truth ! With me, must knowledge  
melt

Into surmise and doubt and disbelief, unless  
Thy music reassure—I gave no idle guess,  
But gained a certitude, myself may hardly keep !  
What care ? since round is piled a monumental heap  
Of music that conserves the assurance, thou as well  
Wast certain of the same ! thou, master of the spell,  
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men  
Feel only to forget ! Who was it helped me, then ?  
What master's work first came responsive to my call,  
Found my eye, fixed my choice ?

91.

Why, Schumann's "Carnival !"

—Choice chiming in, you see, exactly with the sounds  
And sights of yestereve when, going on my rounds,  
Where both roads join the bridge, I heard across the dusk  
Creak a slow caravan, and saw arrive the husk  
O' the spice-nut, which peeled off this morning, and  
displayed,

'Twixt tree and tree, a tent whence the red pennon made  
Its vivid reach for home and ocean-idleness—

And where, my heart surmised, at that same moment,—  
yes,—

Tugging her tricot on,—yet tenderly, lest stitch  
Announce the crack of doom, reveal disaster which  
Our Pornic's modest stock of merceries in vain  
Were ransacked to retrieve,—there, cautiously a-strain,  
(My heart surmised) must crouch in that tent's corner,  
curved

Like Spring-month's russet moon, some beauty, fate  
reserved

To give me once again the electric snap and spark  
That prove, when finger finds out finger in the dark  
O' the world, there's fire and life and truth there, link  
but hands

And pass the secret on ! till, link by link, expands  
The circle, lengthens out the chain, and one  
embrace

Of high with low is found uniting the whole race,  
Not simply you and me and our Fifine, but all  
The world—the Fair expands into the Carnival  
And Carnival again to . . . ah, but that's my dream !

## 92.

I somehow played the piece : remarked on each  
old theme  
I' the new dress ; saw how food o' the soul, the stuff  
that's made  
To furnish man with thought and feeling, is purveyed

Substantially the same from age to age, with change  
Of the outside only for successive feasters. Range  
The banquet-room o' the world, from the dim farthest  
head

O' the table, to its foot, for you and me bespread,  
This merry morn, we find sufficient fare, I trow.  
But, novel? Scrape away the sauce ; and taste, below,  
The verity o' the viand,—you shall perceive there went  
To board-head just the dish which other condiment  
Makes palatable now : guests came, sat down, fell-to,  
Rose up, wiped mouth, went way,—lived, died,—and  
never knew

That generations yet should, seeking sustenance,  
Still find the selfsame fare, with somewhat to enhance  
Its flavour, in the kind of cooking. As with hates  
And loves and fears and hopes, so with what emulates  
The same, expresses hates, loves, fears and hopes in Art :  
The forms, the themes—no one without its counterpart

Ages ago ; no one but, mumbled the due time  
I' the mouth of the eater, needs be cooked again in  
rhyme,  
Dished up anew in paint, sauce-smothered fresh in  
sound,  
To suit the wisdom-tooth, just cut, of the age, that's found  
With gums obtuse to gust and smack which relished so  
The meat o' the meal folks made some fifty years ago.  
But don't suppose the new was able to efface  
The old without a struggle, a pang ! The commonplace  
Still clung about his heart, long after all the rest  
O' the natural man, at eye and ear, was caught, confessed  
The charm of change, although wry lip and wrinkled nose  
Owned ancient virtue more conducive to repose  
Than modern nothing roused to something by some shred  
Of pungency, perchance garlic in amber's stead ?  
And so on, till, one day, another age, by due  
Rotation, pries, sniffs, smacks, discovers old is new.

And sauce, our sires pronounced insipid, proves again  
Sole piquant, and resumes its titillating reign—  
With music, most of all the arts, since change is there  
The law, and not the lapse : the precious means the rare,  
And not the absolute in all good save surprise.  
So I remarked upon our Schumann's victories  
Over the commonplace, how faded phrase grew fine,  
And palled perfection, piqued, up-startled by that brine,  
His pickle, bit the mouth and burnt the tongue aright,  
Beyond the merely good no longer exquisite,—  
Then took things as I found, and thanked without demur  
The pretty piece—played through that movement, you  
    prefer,  
Where dance and shuffle past, he scolding while she  
    pouts,  
She canting while he calms, in those eternal bouts  
Of age, the dog—with youth, the cat—by rose-festoon  
Tied teasingly for ever—Columbine, Pantaloon,

She, toe-tips and *staccato*,—*legato*, shakes his poll  
And shambles in pursuit, the senior. *Fi la folle!*  
Lie to him! get his gold and pay its price! begin  
Your trade betimes, nor wait till you've wed Harlequin  
And need, at the week's end, to play the duteous wife,  
And swear you still love slaps and leapings more than  
    life!  
Pretty! I say.

## 93

And so, I somehow-nohow played  
The whole o' the pretty piece; and then . . whatever  
    weighed  
My eyes down, furred the films about my wits,—sup-  
    pose,  
The morning-bath,—the sweet monotony of those  
Three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp at all,—  
Or else the brain's fatigue, forced even here to fall

Into the same old track, and recognize the shift  
From old to new, and back to old again, and, swift  
Or slow, no matter, still the certainty of change,  
Conviction we shall find the false, where'er we range,  
In Art no less than nature,—or what if wrist were  
numb,

And over-tense the muscle, abductor of the thumb,  
'Taxed by those tenths' and twelfths' unconscionable  
stretch?

Howe'er it came to pass, I soon was far to fetch,—  
Gone off in company with Music !

94.

Whither bound  
Except for Venice? She it was, by instinct found,  
Carnival-country proper, who far below the perch  
Where I was pinnacled, showed, opposite, Mark's  
Church,



And, underneath, Mark's square, with those two lines of  
street,

*Procuratié*-sides, each leading to my feet—

Since I gazed from above, however I got there.

## 95.

And what I gazed upon was a prodigious Fair,  
Concourse immense of men and women, crowned or  
casqued,

Turbaned or tiar'd, wreathed, plumed, hatted or wigged,  
but masked—

Always masked,—only, how? No face-shape, beast or  
bird,

Nay, fish and reptile even, but someone had preferred,  
From out its frontispiece, feathered or scaled or curled,  
To make the vizard whence himself should view the world,  
And where the world believed himself was manifest.  
Yet when you came to look, mixed up among the rest

More funnily by far, were masks to imitate  
Humanity's mishap : the wrinkled brow, bald pate,  
And rheumy eyes of Age, peak'd chin and parchment chap,  
Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near,—  
                  mishap

Merely ; but, Age reduced to simple greed and guile,  
Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile  
A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread  
Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead,—  
Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth ?  
Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,  
Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare  
On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair  
Which covers nothing.

96.

                  These, you are to understand,  
Were the mere hard and sharp distinctions. On each hand,

I soon became aware, flocked the infinitude

Of passions, loves and hates, man pampers till his  
mood

Becomes himself, the whole sole face we name him by,

Nor want denotement else, if age or youth supply

The rest of him : old, young,—classed creature : in the  
main

A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain

Some one way through the flesh—the face, the evidence

O' the soul at work inside ; and, all the more intense,

So much the more grotesque.

97.

“ Why should each soul be tasked

Some one way, by one love or else one hate ? ” I asked,

When it occurred to me, from all these sights beneath

There rose not any sound : a crowd, yet dumb as  
death !

98.

But I knew why. (Propose a riddle, and 't is  
solved

Forthwith—in dream !) They spoke ; but,—since on me  
devolved

To see, and understand by sight,—the vulgar speech  
Might be dispensed with. “He who cannot see, must  
reach

As best he may the truth of men by help of words  
They please to speak, must fare at will of who affords  
The banquet,”—so I thought. “Who sees not, hears  
and so

Gets to believe ; myself it is that, seeing, know,  
And, knowing, can dispense with voice and vanity  
Of speech. What hinders then, that, drawing closer, I  
Put privilege to use, see and know better still  
These *simulachra*, taste the profit of my skill,  
Down in the midst ? ”

99.

And plumb I pitched into the square—

A groundling like the rest. What think you happened there?

Precise the contrary of what one would expect!

For,—whereas, all the more monstrosities deflect

From nature and the type, the more yourself approach

Their precinct,—here, I found brutality encroach

Less on the human, lie the lightlier as I looked

The nearer on these faces that seemed but now so crook'd

And clawed away from God's prime purpose. They

diverged

A little from the type, but somehow rather urged

To pity than disgust : the prominent, before,

Now dwindled into mere distinctness, nothing more.

Still, at first sight, stood forth undoubtedly the fact

Some deviation was : in no one case there lacked

The certain sign and mark, say hint, say, trick of lip

Or twist of nose, that proved a fault in workmanship,

Change in the prime design, some hesitancy here  
And there, which checked man's make and let the beast  
    appear ;  
But that was all.

## 100.

    All ; yet enough to bid each tongue  
Lie in abeyance still. They talked, themselves among,  
Of themselves, to themselves ; I saw the mouths at play,  
The gesture that enforced, the eye that strove to say  
The same thing as the voice, and seldom gained its point  
—That this was so, I saw ; but all seemed out of joint  
I' the vocal medium 'twixt the world and me. I gained  
Knowledge by notice, not by giving ear,—attained  
To truth by what men seemed, not said : to me one  
    glance  
Was worth whole histories of noisy utterance,  
—At least, to me in dream.

101.

And presently I found

That, just as ugliness had withered, so unwound  
Itself, and perished off, repugnance to what wrong  
Might linger yet i' the make of man. My will was strong  
I' the matter ; I could pick and choose, project my weight  
(Remember how we saw the boatman trim his freight !)  
Determine to observe, or manage to escape,  
Or make divergency assume another shape  
By shift of point of sight in me the observer : thus  
Corrected, added to, subtracted from,—discuss  
Each variant quality, and brute-beast touch was turned  
Into mankind's safeguard ! Force, guile, were arms which  
earned

My praise, not blame at all ! for we must learn to live,  
Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,  
But plated for defence, nay, furnished for attack,  
With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back

May suffer in that squeeze with nature, we find—life.

Are we not here to learn the good of peace through  
strife,

Of love through hate, and reach knowledge by ignorance?

Why, those are helps thereto, which late we eyed askance,  
And nicknamed unaware! Just so, a sword we call  
Superfluous, and cry out against, at festival:

Wear it in time of war, its clink and clatter grate  
O' the ear to purpose then!

102.

I found, one must abate  
One's scorn of the soul's case, distinct from the soul's  
self—

Which is the centre-drop; whereas the pride in pelf,  
The lust to seem the thing it cannot be, the greed  
For praise, and all the rest seen outside,—these indeed



Are the hard polished cold crystal environment  
Of those strange orbs unearthed i' the Druid temple,  
meant

For divination (so the learned lean to think)  
Wherein you may admire one dew-drop roll and wink,  
All unaffected by—quite alien to—what sealed  
And saved it long ago : though how it got congealed  
I shall not give a guess, nor how, by power occult,  
The solid surface-shield was outcome and result  
Of simple dew at work to save itself amid  
The unwatery force around ; protected thus, dew slid  
Safe through all opposites impatient to absorb  
Its spot of life, and lasts for ever in the orb  
We, now, from hand to hand pass with impunity.

103.

And the delight wherewith I watch this crowd  
must be

Akin to that which crowns the chemist when he winds  
Thread up and up, till clue be fairly clutched,—un-  
binds

The composite, ties fast the simple to its mate,  
And, tracing each effect back to its cause, elate,  
Constructs in fancy, from the fewest primitives,  
The complex and complete, all diverse life, that lives  
Not only in beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, but  
The very plants and earths and ores. Just so I glut  
My hunger, both to be and know the thing I am,  
By contrast with the thing I am not ; so, through sham  
And outside, I arrive at inmost real, probe  
And prove how the nude form obtained the chequered  
robe.

—Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,  
Here, there and everywhere i' the world, without debate!

Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square  
Rather than Timbuctoo?

105.

And I became aware,  
Scarcely the word escaped my lips, that swift ensued  
In silence and by stealth, and yet with certitude,  
A formidable change of the amphitheatre  
Which held the Carnival; although the human stir  
Continued just the same amid that shift of scene.

106.

For as on edifice of cloud i' the grey and green  
Of evening,—built about some glory of the west,  
To barricade the sun's departure,—manifest,  
He plays, pre-eminently gold, gilds vapour, crag and crest  
Which bend in rapt suspense above the act and deed  
They cluster round and keep their very own, nor heed

The world at watch ; while we, breathlessly at the base  
O' the castellated bulk, note momentarily the mace  
Of night fall here, fall there, bring change with every blow,  
Alike to sharpened shaft and broadened portico  
I' the structure : heights and depths, beneath the leaden  
stress,

Crumble and melt and mix together, coalesce,  
Re-form, but sadder still, subdued yet more and more  
By every fresh defeat, till wearied eyes need pore  
No longer on the dull impoverished decadence  
Of all that pomp of pile in towering evidence  
So lately :—

107.

Even thus nor otherwise, meseemed  
That if I fixed my gaze awhile on what I dreamed  
Was Venice' Square, Mark's Church, the scheme was  
straight unschemed,

A subtle something had its way within the heart  
Of each and every house I watched, with counterpart  
Of tremor through the front and outward face, until  
Mutation was at end ; impassive and stock-still  
Stood now the ancient house, grown—new, is scarce the  
phrase,

Since older, in a sense,—altered to . . . what i' the ways,  
Ourselves are wont to see, coërced by city, town  
Or village, anywhere i' the world, pace up or down  
Europe ! In all the maze, no single tenement  
I saw, but I could claim acquaintance with !

108.

There went  
Conviction to my soul, that what I took of late  
For Venice was the world ; its Carnival—the state  
Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence  
For all time, and no one particular feast-day. Whence

'T was easy to infer what meant my late disgust  
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of gréed and  
lust

And idle hate, and love as impotent for good—  
When from my pride of place I passed the interlude  
In critical review ; and what, the wonder that ensued  
When, from such pinnacled pre-eminence, I found  
Somehow the proper goal for wisdom was the ground  
And not the sky,—so, slid sagaciously betimes  
Down heaven's baluster-rope, to reach the mob of  
mimes

And mummers ; whereby came discovery there was just  
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust,  
Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift  
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift  
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames  
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different  
names

According to what stage i' the process turned his rough  
 Even as I gazed, to smooth—only get close enough !  
 —What was all this except the lesson of a life ?

## 109.

And—consequent upon the learning how from strife  
 Grew peace—from evil, good—came knowledge that,  
     to get  
 Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must nor fret  
 Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,  
 But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be,  
 And, with as good a grace, welcome what is—we find.

## 110.

Is—for the hour, observe ! Since something to my  
     mind  
 Suggested soon the fancy, nay, certitude that change,  
 Never suspending touch, continued to derange

What architecture, we, walled up within the cirque  
O' the world, consider fixed as fate, not fairy-work.  
For those were temples, sure, which tremblingly grew blank  
From bright, then broke afresh in triumph,—ah, but sank  
As soon, for liquid change through artery and vein  
O' the very marble wound its way ! And first a stain  
Would startle and offend amid the glory ; next,  
Spot swift succeeded spot, but found me less perplexed  
By portents ; then as 't were a sleepiness soft stole  
Over the stately fane, and shadow sucked the whole  
Façade into itself, made uniformly earth  
What was a piece of heaven ; till, lo, a second birth,  
And the veil broke away because of something new  
Inside, that pushed to gain an outlet, paused in view  
At last, and proved a growth of stone or brick or wood  
Which, alien to the aim o' the Builder, somehow stood  
The test, could satisfy, if not the early race  
For whom he built, at least our present populace,



Who must not bear the blame for what, blamed, proves  
mishap

Of the Artist : his work gone, another fills the gap,  
Serves the prime purpose so. Undoubtedly there spreads  
Building around, above, which makes men lift their heads  
To look at, or look through, or look—for aught I care—  
Over : if only up, it is, not down, they stare,  
“ Commercing with the skies,” and not the pavement in  
the Square.

## III.

But are they only temples that subdivide, collapse,  
And tower again, transformed? Academies, perhaps !  
Domes where dwells Learning, seats of Science, bower  
and hall

Which house Philosophy—do these, too, rise and fall,  
Based though foundations be on steadfast mother-earth,  
With no chimeric claim to supermundane birth,

No boast that, dropped from cloud, they did not grow  
from ground ?

Why, these fare worst of all ! these vanish and are found  
Nowhere, by who tasks eye some twice within his term  
Of three-score years and ten, for tidings what each germ  
Has burgeoned out into, whereof the promise stunned  
His ear with such acclaim,—praise-payment to refund  
The praisers, never doubt, some twice before they die  
Whose days are long i' the land.

## 112.

Alack, Philosophy !

Despite the chop and change, diminished or increased,  
Patched-up and plastered-o'er, Religion stands at least  
I' the temple-type. But thou ? Here gape I, all agog  
These thirty years, to learn how tadpole turns to frog ;  
And thrice at least have gazed with mild astonishment,  
As, skyward up and up, some fire-new fabric sent

Its challenge to mankind that, clustered underneath—  
They hear the word and strait believe, ay, in the teeth  
O' the Past, clap hands and hail triumphant Truth's out-  
break—

Tadpole-frog-theory propounded past mistake !  
In vain ! A something ails the edifice, it bends,  
It bows, it buries . . . Haste ! cry "Heads below" to  
friends—

But have no fear they find, when smother shall subside,  
Some substitution perk with unabated pride  
I' the predecessor's place !

## 113.

No,—the one voice which failed

Never, the preachment's coigne of vantage nothing ailed,—  
That had the luck to lodge i' the house not made with  
hands !

And all it preached was this: "Truth builds upon the sands,

Though stationed on a rock : and so her work decays,  
And so she builds afresh, with like result. Nought  
stays

But just the fact that Truth not only is, but fain  
Would have men know she needs must be, by each so  
plain

Attempt to visibly inhabit where they dwell.”

Her works are work, while she is she ; that work does  
well

Which lasts mankind their life-time through, and lets  
believe

One generation more, that, though sand run through  
sieve,

Yet earth now reached is rock, and what we moderns find  
Erected here is Truth, who, 'stablished to her mind  
I' the fulness of the days, will never change in show  
More than in substance erst : men thought they knew ;  
we know !

## 114.

Do you, my generation? Well, let the blocks prove mist  
I' the main enclosure,—church and college, if they list,  
Be something for a time, and everything anon,  
And anything awhile, as fit is off or on,  
Till they grow nothing, soon to re-appear no less  
As something,—shape re-shaped, till out of shapelessness  
Come shape again as sure ! no doubt, or round or square  
Or polygon its front, some building will be there,  
Do duty in that nook o' the wall o' the world where once  
The Architect saw fit precisely to ensconce  
College or church, and bid such bulwark guard the line  
O' the barrier round about, humanity's confine.

## 115.

Leave watching change at work i' the greater scale,  
on these  
The main supports, and turn to their interstices

Filled up by fabrics too, less costly and less rare,  
Yet of importance, yet essential to the Fair  
They help to circumscribe, instruct and regulate !  
See, where each booth-front boasts, in letters small or great,  
Its specialty, proclaims its privilege to stop  
A breach, beside the best !

## 116.

Here History keeps shop,  
Tells how past deeds were done, so and not otherwise :  
“ Man ! hold truth evermore ! forget the early lies ! ”  
There sits Morality, demure behind her stall,  
Dealing out life and death : “ This is the thing to call  
Right, and this other, wrong ; thus think, thus do,  
thus say,  
Thus joy, thus suffer !—not to-day as yesterday—  
Yesterday’s doctrine dead, this only shall endure !  
Obey its voice and live ! ”—enjoins the dame demure.

While Art gives flag to breeze, bids drum beat,  
trumpet blow,

Inviting eye and ear to yonder raree-show.

Up goes the canvas, hauled to height of pole. I think,  
We know the way—long lost, late learned—to paint !

A wink

Of eye, and lo, the pose ! the statue on its plinth !

How could we moderns miss the heart o' the labyrinth

Perversely all these years, permit the Greek seclude

His secret till to-day ? And here 's another feud

Now happily composed : inspect this quartett-score !

Got long past melody, no word has Music more

To say to mortal man ! But is the bard to be

Behindhand ? Here 's his book, and now perhaps you see

At length, what poetry can do !

117.

Why, that 's stability

Itself, that change on change we sorrowfully saw  
Creep o'er the prouder piles ! We acquiesced in law  
When the fine gold grew dim i' the temple, when the brass  
Which pillared that so brave abode where Knowledge was,  
Bowed and resigned the trust ; but, bear all this caprice,  
Harlequinade where swift to birth succeeds decease  
Of hue at every turn o' the tinsel-flag which flames  
While Art holds booth in Fair ? Such glories chased by  
shames

Like these, distract beyond the solemn and august  
Procedure to decay, evanishment in dust,  
Of those marmoreal domes,—above vicissitude,  
We used to hope !

118.

“ So, all is change, in fine,” pursued  
The preachment to a pause. When—“ All is permanence ! ”  
Returned a voice. Within ? without ? No matter whence



The explanation came : for, understand, I ought  
To simply say—I saw, each thing I say I thought.  
Since ever as, unrolled, the strange scene-picture grew  
Before me, sight flashed first, though mental comment  
too

Would follow in a trice, come hobblingly to halt.

## 119.

So, what did I see next but,—much as when the  
vault

I' the west,—wherein we watch the vapoury, manifold  
Transfiguration,—tired would turn to rest,—behold,  
Peak reconciled to base, dark ending feud with  
bright,

The multiform subsides, is found the definite.

Contrasting lifes and strifes, where battle they i' the  
blank

Severity of death and peace, for which we thank

One cloud that comes to quell the concourse, fall at last  
Into a shape befits the close of things, and cast  
Palpably o'er vexed earth, heaven's mantle of repose ?

## 120.

Just so, in Venice' Square, that things were at the close  
Was signalled to my sense ; for I perceived arrest  
O' the change all round about. As if some impulse  
pressed

Each gently into each, what was distinctness, late,  
Grew vague, and, line from line no longer separate,  
No matter what the style, edifice . . shall I say,  
Died into edifice ? I find no simpler way  
Of saying how, without or dash or shock or trace  
Of violence, I found unity in the place  
Of temple, tower, and hall and house and hut,—one  
blank

Severity of death and peace ; to which they sank

Resigned enough, till . . ah, conjecture, I beseech,  
What special blank did they agree to, all and each?  
What common shape was that wherein they mutely merged  
Likes and dislikes of form, so plain before?

## 121.

I urged

Your step this way, prolonged our path of enterprise  
To where we stand at last, in order that your eyes  
Might see the very thing, and save my tongue describe  
The Druid monument which fronts you. Could I bribe  
Nature to come in aid, illustrate what I mean,  
What wants there she would lend to solemnize the scene?

## 122.

How does it strike you, this construction gaunt and  
grey?  
Sole object, these piled stones, that gleam unground away

By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine all beside  
I' the solitary waste we grope through. Oh, no guide  
However, need we now to reach the monstrous door  
Of granite ! Take my word, the deeper you explore  
That caverned passage, filled with fancies to the brim,  
The less will you approve the adventure ! such a grim  
Bar-sinister soon blocks abrupt your path, and ends  
All with a cold dread shape,—shape whereon Learning  
          spends

Labour, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss,  
While Ignorance reads right—recoiling from that Cross !  
Whence came the mass and mass, strange quality of  
          stone

Unquarried anywhere i' the region round ? Unknown !  
Just as unknown, how such enormity could be  
Conveyed by land, or else transported over sea,  
And laid in order, so, precisely each on each  
As you and I would build a grotto where the beach

Sheds shell—to last an hour : this building lasts from age  
To age the same. But why?

123.

Ask Learning ! I engage  
You get a prosy wherefore, shall help you to advance  
In knowledge just as much as helps you Ignorance  
Surmising, in the mouth of peasant-lad or lass,  
“ I heard my father say he understood it was  
A building, people built as soon as earth was made  
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)  
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.  
They laboured that their work might last, and show  
thereby  
He stays, while we and earth, and all things come and  
go.  
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and  
gone, we know

Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best  
Attention : we must wait and die to know the rest.

Ask, if that 's true, what use in setting up the pile ?

To make one fear and hope : remind us, all the while

We come and go, outside there 's Somebody that stays ;

A circumstance which ought to make us mind our ways,

Because,—whatever end we answer by this life,—

Next time, best chance must be for who, with toil and  
strife,

Manages now to live most like what he was meant

Become : since who succeeds so far, 't is evident,

Stands foremost on the file ; who fails, has less to hope

From new promotion. That 's the rule—with even a  
rope

Of mushrooms, like this rope I dangle ! those that grew

Greatest and roundest, all in life they had to do,

Gain a reward, a grace they never dreamed, I think ;

Since, outside white as milk and inside black as ink,

They go to the Great House to make a dainty dish  
For Don and Donna ; while this basket-load, I wish  
Well off my arm, it breaks,—no starveling of the heap  
But had his share of dew, his proper length of sleep  
I' the sunshine : yet, of all, the outcome is—this queer  
Cribbed quantity of dwarfs which burthen basket here  
Till I reach home ; 't is there that having run their rigs,  
They end their earthly race, are flung as food for pigs.  
Any more use I see ? Well, you must know, there lies  
Something, the Curé says, that points to mysteries  
Above our grasp : a huge stone pillar, once upright,  
Now laid at length, half-lost—discreetly shunning sight  
I' the bush and briar, because of stories in the air—  
Hints what it signified, and why was stationed there,  
Once on a time. In vain the Curé tasked his lungs—  
Showed, in a preachment, how, at bottom of the rungs  
O' the ladder, Jacob saw, where heavenly angels stept  
Up and down, lay a stone which served him, while he slept,

For pillow ; when he woke, he set the same upright  
As pillar, and a-top poured oil : things requisite  
To instruct posterity, there mounts from floor to roof,  
A staircase, earth to heaven ; and also put in proof,  
When we have scaled the sky, we well may let alone  
What raised us from the ground, and,—paying to the  
stone

Proper respect, of course,—take staff and go our way,  
Leaving the Pagan night for Christian break of day.

‘ For,’ preached he, ‘ what they dreamed, these Pagans,  
wide-awake

‘ We Christians may behold. How strange, then, were  
mistake

‘ Did anybody style the stone,—because of drop

‘ Remaining there from oil which Jacob poured a-top,—

‘ Itself the Gate of Heaven, itself the end, and not

‘ The means thereto !’ Thus preached the Curé, and  
no jot



The more persuaded people but that, what once a  
thing

Meant and had right to mean, it still must mean.

So cling

Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,  
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach  
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,  
Through rude character, than all the grace it lends,  
That lettering of your scribes ! who flourish pen apace  
And ornament the text, they say—we say, efface.  
Hence, when the earth began its life afresh in May,  
And fruit-trees bloomed, and waves would wanton, and  
the bay

Ruffle its wealth of weed, and stranger-birds arrive,  
And beasts take each a mate,—folk, too, found sensitive,  
Surmised the old grey stone upright there, through such  
tracts

Of solitariness and silence, kept the facts

Entrusted it, could deal out doctrine, did it please :  
No fresh and frothy draught, but liquor on the lees,  
Strong, savage and sincere : first bleedings from a vine  
Whereof the product now do Curés so refine  
To insipidity, that, when heart sinks, we strive  
And strike from out the old stone the old restorative.  
‘ Which is ? ’—why, go and ask our grandames how  
they used

To dance around it, till the Curé disabused  
Their ignorance, and bade the parish in a band  
Lay flat the obtrusive thing that cumbered so the land !  
And there, accordingly, in bush and briar it—‘ bides  
‘ Its time to rise again ! ’ (so somebody derides,  
That’s pert from Paris) ‘ since, yon spire, you keep erect  
Yonder, and pray beneath, is nothing, I suspect,  
‘ But just the symbol’s self, expressed in slate for rock,  
‘ Art’s smooth for Nature’s rough, new chip from the old  
block ! ’

There, sir, my say is said ! Thanks, and Saint Gille  
increase

The wealth bestowed so well ! ”—wherewith he pockets  
piece,

Doffs cap, and takes the road. I leave in Learning’s  
clutch

More money for his book, but scarcely gain as much.

## 124.

To this it was, this same primæval monument,  
That, in my dream, I saw building with building blent  
Fall : each on each they fast and founderingly went  
Confusion-ward ; but thence again subsided fast,  
Became the mound you see. Magnificently massed  
Indeed, those mammoth-stones, piled by the Protoplast  
Temple-wise in my dream ! beyond compare with fanes  
Which, solid-looking late, had left no least remains  
I’ the bald and blank, now sole usurper of the plains

Of heaven, diversified and beautiful before.  
And yet simplicity appeared to speak no more  
Nor less to me than spoke the compound. At the core,  
One and no other word, as in the crust of late,  
Whispered, which, audible through the transition-state,  
Was no loud utterance in even the ultimate  
Disposure. For as some imperial chord subsists,  
Steadily underlies the accidental mists  
Of music springing thence, that run their mazy race  
Around, and sink, absorbed, back to the triad base,—  
So, out of that one word, each variant rose and fell  
And left the same “All ’s change, but permanence  
as well.”

—Grave note whence — list aloft! — harmonics sound,  
that mean :

“ Truth inside, and outside, truth also ; and between  
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.  
The individual soul works through the shows of sense,

(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)  
Up to an outer soul as individual too ;  
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,  
And reach at length ' God, man, or both together mixed,'  
Transparent through the flesh, by parts which prove a whole,  
By hints which make the soul discernible by soul—  
Let only soul look up, not down, not hate but love,  
As truth successively takes shape, one grade above  
Its last presentment, tempts as it were truth indeed  
Revealed this time ; so tempts, till we attain to read  
The signs aright, and learn, by failure, truth is forced  
To manifest itself through falsehood ; whence divorced  
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for  
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor  
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby.  
Then do we understand the value of a lie ;  
Its purpose served, its truth once safe deposited,  
Each lie, superfluous now, leaves, in the singer's stead,

The indubitable song ; the historic personage  
 Put by, leaves prominent the impulse of his age ;  
 Truth sets aside speech, act, time, place, indeed, but brings  
 Nakedly forward now the principle of things  
 Highest and least."

## 125.

Wherewith change ends. What other  
 change to dread  
 When, disengaged at last from every veil, instead  
 Of type remains the truth? Once—falsehood : but anon  
*Theosuton e broteion eper kekramenon,*  
 Something as true as soul is true, though veils between  
 Are false and fleet away. As I mean, did he mean,  
 The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear  
 A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and drear  
 Brought comfort to the Titan? Emerging from the lymph,  
 " God, man, or mixture " proved only to be a nymph :

“ From whom the clink on clink of metal ” (money,  
judged

Abundant in my purse) “struck ” (bumped at, till it  
budded)

“ The modesty, her soul’s habitual resident ”

(Where late the sisterhood were lively in their tent)

“ As out of wingèd car ” (that caravan on wheels)

“ Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels,”

And “ Fear not, friends we flock ! ” soft smiled the sea-  
Fifine—

Primitive of the veils (if he meant what I mean)

The poet’s Titan learned to lift, ere “ Three-formed  
Fate,

*Moirai Trimorphoi* ” stood unmasked the Ultimate.

Enough o’ the dream ! You see how poetry turns  
prose.

Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close  
Down to mere commonplace which everybody knows.  
But dreaming disappoints. The fresh and strange at first,  
Soon wear to trite and tame, nor warrant the outburst  
Of heart with which we hail those heights, at very brink  
Of heaven, whereto one least of lifts would lead, we  
think ;

But wherefrom quick decline conducts our step, we find,  
To homely earth, and fact familiar left behind.  
Did not this monument, for instance, long ago  
Say all it had to say, show all it had to show,  
Nor promise to do duty more in dream?

127.

Awaking so,  
What if we, homeward-bound, all peace and some  
fatigue,  
Trudge, soberly complete our tramp of near a league,



Last little mile which makes the circuit just, Elvire?  
We end where we began : that consequence is clear.  
All peace and some fatigue, wherever we were nursed  
To life, we bosom us on death, find last is first  
And thenceforth final too.

128.

“ Why final ? Why the more  
Worth credence now than when such truth proved  
false before ? ”

Because a novel point impresses now : each lie  
Redounded to the praise of man, was victory  
Man's nature had both right to get, and might to gain,  
And by no means implied submission to the reign  
Of other quite as real a nature, that saw fit  
To have its way with man, not man his way with it.  
This time, acknowledgment and acquiescence quell  
Their contrary in man ; promotion proves as well

Defeat : and Truth, unlike the False with Truth's outside,  
Neither plumes up his will nor puffs him out with pride.  
I fancy, there must lurk some cogency i' the claim,  
Man, such abatement made, submits to, all the same.  
Soul finds no triumph, here, to register like Sense  
With whom 't is ask and have,—the want, the evidence  
That the thing wanted, soon or late, will be supplied.  
This indeed plumes up will, this, sure, puffs out with  
pride,

When, reading records right, man's instincts still attest  
Promotion comes to Sense because Sense likes it best ;  
For bodies sprouted legs, through a desire to run :  
While hands, when fain to filch, got fingers one by one,  
And nature, that 's ourself, accommodative brings  
To bear that, tired of legs which walk, we now bud  
wings

Since of a mind to fly. Such savour in the nose  
Of Sense, would stimulate Soul sweetly, I suppose,

Soul with its proper itch of instinct, prompting clear  
 To recognize soul's self soul's only master here  
 Alike from first to last. But, if time 's pressure,  
     light's

Or rather, dark's approach, wrest thoroughly the rights  
 Of rule away, and bid the soul submissive bear  
 Another soul than it play master everywhere  
 In great and small,—this time, I fancy, none disputes  
 There 's something in the fact that such conclusion  
     suits

Nowise the pride of man, nor yet chimes in with attributes  
 Conspicuous in the lord of nature. He receives  
 And not demands—not first likes faith and then believes.

129.

And as with the last essence so with its first faint  
     type.

Inconstancy means raw, 't is faith alone means ripe

I<sup>3</sup> the soul which runs its round : no matter how it range  
From Helen to Fifine, Elvire bids back the change  
To permanence. Here, too, love ends where love began.  
Such ending looks like law, because the natural man  
Inclines the other way, feels lordlier free than bound.  
Poor pabulum for pride when the first love is found  
Last also ! and, so far from realizing gain,  
Each step aside just proves divergency in vain.  
The wanderer brings home no profit from his quest  
Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best  
Could life begin anew. His problem posed aright  
Was—"From the given point evolve the infinite !"  
Not—"Spend thyself in space, endeavouring to joint  
Together, and so make infinite, point and point :  
Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines !"  
Fifine, the foam-flake, she : Elvire, the sea's self, means  
Capacity at need to shower how many such !  
And yet we left her calm profundity, to clutch

Foam-flutter, bell on bell, that, bursting at a touch,  
Blistered us for our pains. But wise, we want no more  
O' the fickle element. Enough of foam and roar !  
Land-locked, we live and die henceforth : for here's the  
villa-door.

130.

How pallidly you pause o' the threshold ! Hardly  
night,  
Which drapes you, ought to make real flesh and blood so  
white !  
Touch me, and so appear alive to all intents !  
Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents ?  
Suppose you are a ghost ! A memory, a hope,  
A fear, a conscience ! Quick ! Give back the hand I grope  
I' the dusk for !

131.

That is well. Our double horoscope

I cast, while you concur. Discard that simile  
O' the fickle element ! Elvire is land not sea—  
The solid land, the safe. All these word-bubbles came  
O' the sea, and bite like salt. The unlucky bath 's to  
blame.

This hand of yours on heart of mine, no more the bay  
I beat, nor bask beneath the blue ! In Pornic, say,  
The Mayor shall catalogue me duly domiciled,  
Contributable, good-companion of the guild  
And mystery of marriage. I stickle for the town,  
And not this tower apart ; because, though, half-way down,  
Its mullions wink o'er-webbed with bloomy greenness, yet  
Who mounts to staircase top, may tempt the parapet,  
And sudden there 's the sea ! No memories, to arouse,  
No fancies, to delude ! Our honest civic house  
Of the earth be earthy too !—or graced perchance with  
shell

Made prize of long ago, picked haply where the swell

Menaced a little once—or seaweed-branch that yet  
Dampens and softens, notes a freak of wind, a fret  
Of wave : though, why on earth should sea-change mend  
or mar

The calm comtemplative householders that we are ?  
So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide :  
E'en past astonishment how sunrise and springtide  
Could tempt one forth to swim ; the more if time  
appoints

That swimming grow a task for one's rheumatic joints.  
Such honest civic house, behold, I constitute  
Our villa ! Be but flesh and blood, and smile to boot !  
Enter for good and all ! then fate bolt fast the door,  
Shut you and me inside, never to wander more !

132.

Only,—you do not use to apprehend attack !  
No doubt, the way I march, one idle arm, thrown slack

Behind me, leaves the open hand defenceless at the  
back,  
Should an impertinent on tiptoe steal, and stuff  
—Whatever can it be? A letter sure enough,  
Pushed betwixt palm and glove! That largess of a franc?  
Perhaps unconsciously,—to better help the blank  
O' the nest, her tambourine, and, laying egg, persuade  
A family to follow, the nest-egg that I laid  
May have contained,—but just to foil suspicious folk,—  
Between two silver whites a yellow double yolk!  
Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice  
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice  
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain—  
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!

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## EPILOGUE.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

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### I.

SAVAGE I was sitting in my house, late, lone :

Dreary, weary with the long day's work :

Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone :

Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk ;

When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,

Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we !—

“ What, and is it really you again ? ” quoth I :

“ I again, what else did you expect ? ” quoth She.

## 2.

“ Never mind, hie away from this old house—

Every crumbling brick embrowned with sin and shame !  
Quick, in its corners ere certain shapes arouse !

Let them—every devil of the night—lay claim,  
Make and mend, or rap and rend, for me ! Goodbye !

God be their guard from disturbance at their glee,  
Till, crash, comes down the carcass in a heap !” quoth I :

“ Nay, but there ’s a decency required !” quoth She.

## 3.

“ Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days,  
nights !

All the neighbour-talk with man and maid—such men !  
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights :

All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof ; and  
then,

All the fancies . . . Who were they had leave, dared try  
Darker arts that almost struck despair in me ?

If you knew but how I dwelt down here !” quoth I :

“ And was I so better off up there ?” quoth She.

## 4.

“ Help and get it over ! *Re-united to his wife*

(How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know ?)

*Lies M. or N., departed from this life,*

*Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.*

What i' the way of final flourish ? Prose, verse ? Try !

*Affliction sore, long time he bore, or, what is it to be ?*

*Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end ! ”* quoth I :

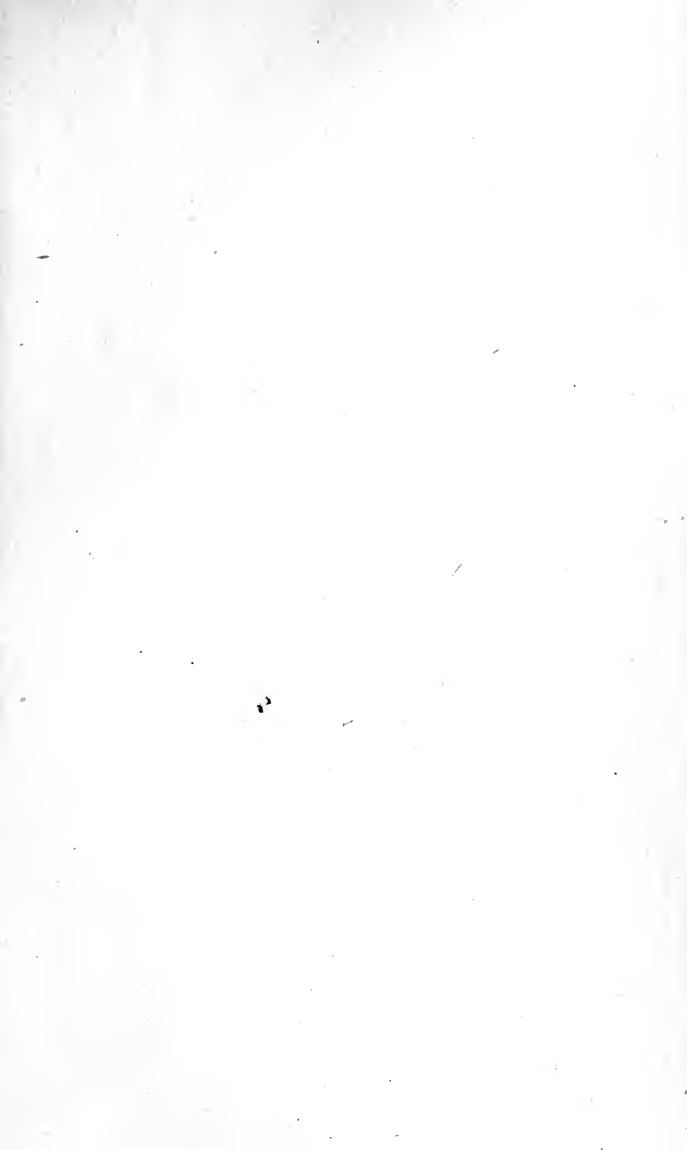
“ I end with—Love is all and Death is nought ! ” quoth

She.

THE END.

LONDON:  
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,  
OLD BAILEY, E.C.

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F53  
1872

